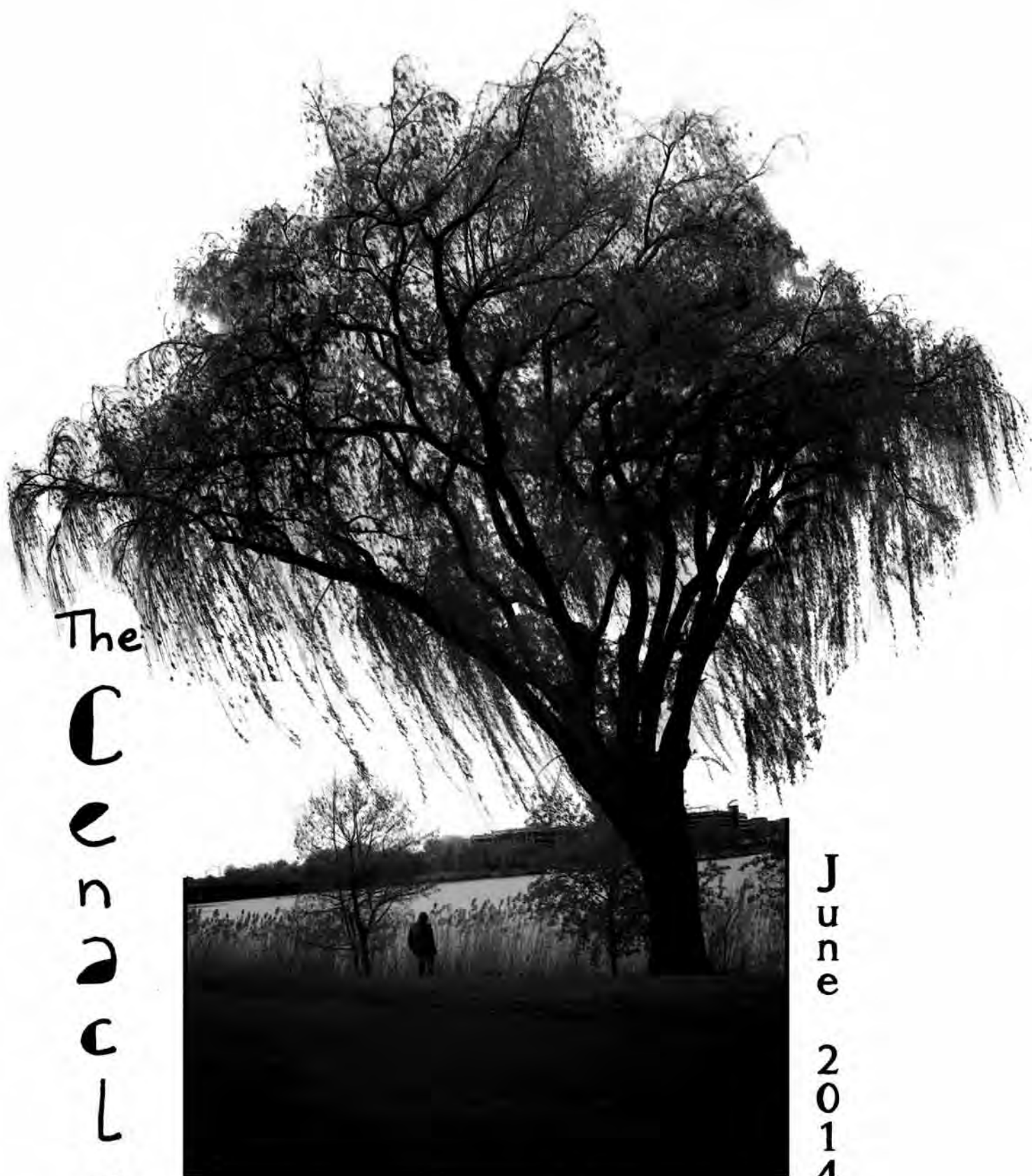
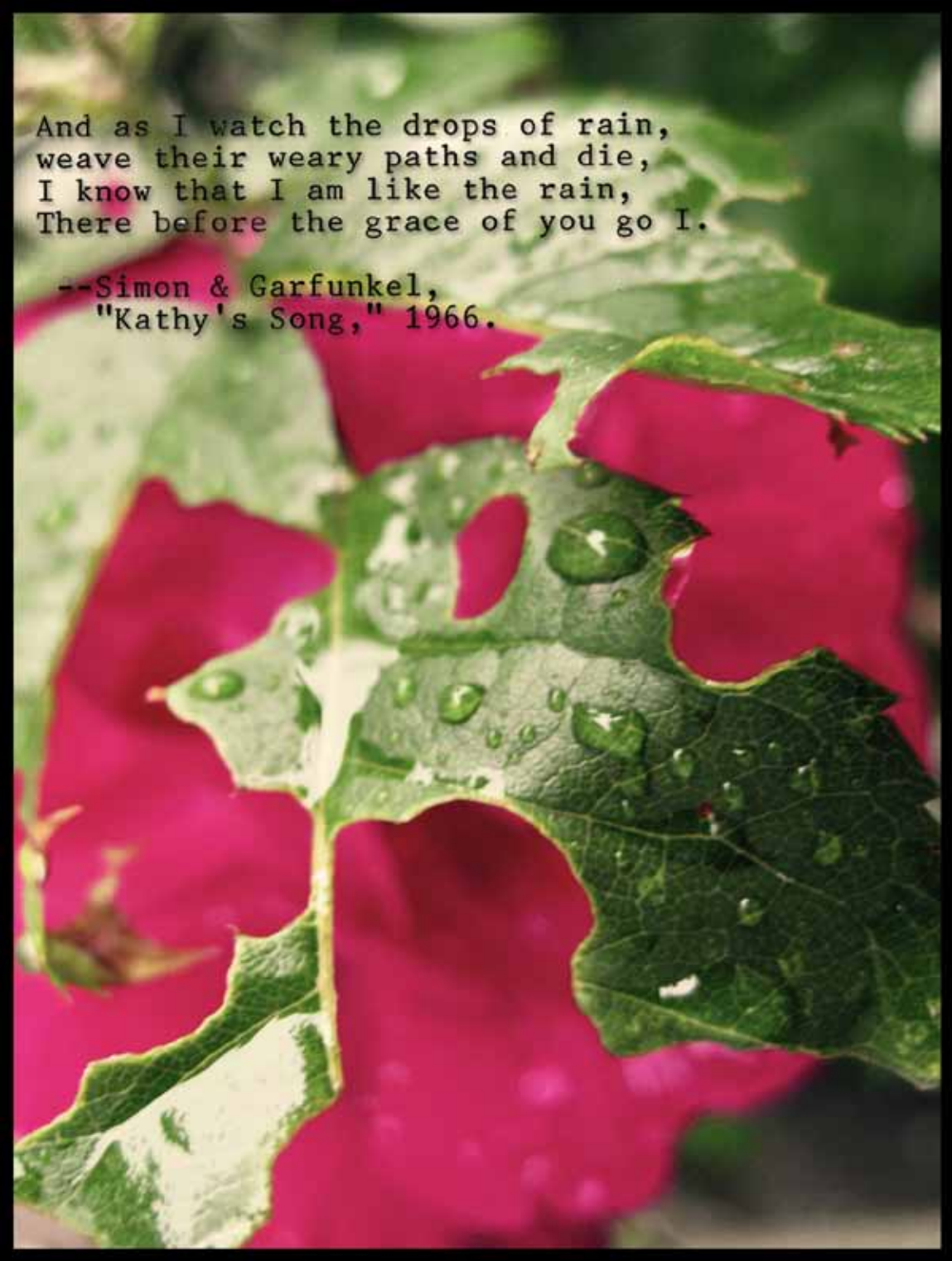


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Number 89 ©



And as I watch the drops of rain,
weave their weary paths and die,
I know that I am like the rain,
There before the grace of you go I.

--Simon & Garfunkel,
"Kathy's Song," 1966.

June 28, 2014

10:53 p.m.

Christian Science Park
Boston, MA. ^(Reflecting Pool)

An experiment, lines from the "Quilts & Colors" exhibition at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, & their variations tonight:

At Eventide

Trucks blow smokey noise in
the traffic on the bridge over
the quiet muddy water.

I sit with my book of melodies on one side.
You sit tapping & tooting your pipes on the other.

Strange fish glide by.
Toads seeming to wait, not waiting.

In daylight's last hour, the day's clouds
& rain leave. Traffic clears up.
The trucks leave. Pinkish-green &
blue-umber fill the sky's great window.



-18-

I read these words across the water
to you, breeze carrying, stopping them
away. You puff your pipes & meet me
in the swirl/halfway.

Now dark, stars, another world begins.

Glaring

Trucks blare smoky noise on
the bridge overhead, traffic fooled
between here & there.

I study my book of melodies on this shore.
You toddle with your pipes on that one.

Strange fish in my book glide by.
Toads seeming to wait, not waiting.

Daylight's last hour, clarity, shine.
Trucks go & go & gone. The sky's blues
grade down to near forever.



-19-

I read these words loud across the water,
you catch a dew, smile, enough
to play to, play back to me.

Now darkness, better lights, another world
releases.

* * * * *

Release

The monsters on the bridge above crowd
close & breathe heavy, badly.
We are hidden to their sad furies below.

I hold my green book of melodies, turning
thin pages & listening. You play the words
my fingers touch, across the shore,
your ironic perch.

Strange fish on the globe forever.
Toads, seaming, wait out the worst.

Last hours, shine gives way to shine.
Something holds, & you play it, &
you play it, & I try to sing.

-20-
These words touch your fingertips,
tangle in your bonnet, land with a sigh.
You laugh. You've not begun to play me.

Now darkness, more laughing,
fingers long enough to hold a heart
by the half-mile.

* * * * *

Evening Tide

They built a bridge out far into
the ocean, remains incomplete,
like a half-made fist.

I hold my green book of melodies
in the sand, I am nude & sad
& considering that bridge.

Strange fish at its far point,
their colors uncertain, too dazzling.

Last hours, I climb to its walkway,
feel it sway, feel it steady,
begin to walk.

-21-

I read from my book, shakily,
to your ghost, to your many ghosts,
to every ghost alive & remembering.

Now darkness, this bridge is holding
me better than I am. I keep reading
& walk. Keep singing & walk.

* * * * *

Island of Mind

On this island of mind, seas
joining mine to yours, but no bridge,
we've forgot the bridge.

Every page I write is for you,
to name you, to touch you,
to possess you, to possess you far.

I listen. Are you playing for me,
as well? Do you remember the bridge?
What's possible by starlight?

I say these words as I imagine
your ear, as I imagine your hand,
as I imagine your smile & reply.

* * * * *

Eventide

I just will myself deeper ~~the~~ part
of world's song, every page
my throat, every page my croon
& cry. I will you hear me,
& breathe, relax. And away.

I am this book that shifts through
your heart, beat & breaths,
melodies of waves & daylight bowing.

Dream me a fish to nuzzle you,
to feed you, to keep you drown.

The darkness is gentle, after all,
& I hold you, & you hold me,
& you say Simple Simple. Let be.

* * * * *

Well, that was fun. Unknowing,
diving in, a swoop, a splash,
the night gorgeous & soft to the task.

16-28-2014

The Cenacle

Number 89 • June 2014

Edited by Raymond Souland Jr.

Assistant Editor: Kassandra Souland

PROSE POETRY by Victor Vanek	1
POETRY by Renée Schamberger	5
FACELESS IN THE DARK [TRAVEL JOURNAL] by Nathan D. Horowitz	9
MANY MUSICS [POETRY] by Raymond Souland, Jr. [🌀]	17
NOTES FROM NEW ENGLAND [COMMENTARY] by Raymond Souland, Jr. [🌀]	43
POETRY by Martina Newberry	47
PALEO REDEMPTION [TRAVEL JOURNAL] by Charlie Beyer	53
POETRY by Bashō	65
GALLERY: QUILTS AND COLOR	69
POETRY by Judih Haggai	73
CAITLIN, TOLLGATE COLLECTOR [NEW FICTION] by Tom Sheehan	77
POETRY by Joe Ciccone	81
END THE BAN ON PSYCHOACTIVE DRUG RESEARCH [EDITORIAL] by the Editors of <i>Scientific American</i>	83
POETRY by Joe Coleman	85
LABYRINTHINE [A NEW FICTION] by Raymond Souland, Jr. [🌀]	91
NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS	114

SCRIPTOR PRESS



NEW ENGLAND

2014

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- Burning Man Books #1-66
- *Scriptor Press Sampler* #1-14
- *RaiBooks* #1-7
- RS Mixes from “Within’s Within: Scenes from the Psychedelic Revolution”; &
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Thank you to the People’s Donutshop in New Britain, Connecticut, for making a mournful trip in the area to undo my recently passed mother’s house not entirely a sad trawl into the past. . .





The B String

Excited by a song coming through my computer (some strummy guitar thing), she asked if she could grab my guitar and play along. I warned her that I hadn't even picked the thing up in over a year, so it might be badly out of tune.

She listened to the song and tried to find the key that it was being played in. She ran her pretty fingers up and down the fret board, searching for notes that were same as the song's notes.

Like the old children's crank toy goes . . . "Pop" goes the B string! It was a funny moment. The shock that comes with a suddenly broken string. The exasperated look, and then the tumble of apologies. Suddenly, she appeared to me as a stone that, when the sunlight pierces it perfectly, shows you something not suspected. What I saw was very pretty.

At that moment, I wanted very much to kiss her on the mouth, and take her into my bed, and pull the covers over the both of our heads. I wanted to run out the door with her and join the circus. Maybe I could talk my way into the entry-level position of Elephant Washer and work my way up to reading children's stories to the Ringmaster's kids. She could easily get a job as Cigarette Girl or convincing young men to play impossible games for plastic trinkets that looked like Shiva on a bicycle, or key fobs with the first two lines of Poe's "The Raven" on them.

The passage of a couple days led me to procuring two new sets of my favorite guitar strings. I thought maybe that broken B string might get me to string my guitar, and maybe see if my fingers could even find a chord. It'd been a while.

I thought much of her in the stringing of my instrument. I tuned everything the way I do, and tried to find a G chord. I fingered it up a fret too high, and then brought it back down to where my hand should have fallen. In attempting an A minor, I instead went to D minor. I was suddenly reminded of a Billy Collins poem that I had once read to her about a five piece jazz ensemble of angels playing on the head of a pin.

The second set of strings that I purchased, I hoped to give to her (actually, I secretly wished she would let me tune her guitar for her). I wasn't exactly sure how the whole thing would go, because what I really wanted was to simply sit by her side for a moment or two. The stringing of a guitar is a seductive act. The waiting string placed between the lips, and the other string being set perfectly, and then being pulled from slack to tight. The long pull of the string and threading of tuning peg. The desire to get it perfect on the very first try.

I think I'll take a bath now and try to soap some of my feelings away, and let them drain back into where the water comes from.

* * *

The Oriole

She was standing at the window wearing my work shirt and only panties underneath, barefoot in the new morning. It was Saturday.

My work shirt is a long thing made for tucking into the tops of the dungaree trousers that are provided for me by my work. She didn't wear it immodestly—it was buttoned just short of the top button, and it hung down just near mid-thigh. When I get my shirts from work I have to order them “Long and Tall.” The regular shirts never seem to fit right, and the tall ones are just a little too long. On that hazel-eyed girl, it was perfect. The first time I saw her wear one last year, her curves making that teal expression of cloth pop, I was actually kind of startled. I remember thinking: “Wow.”

When I wear that shirt, and see my own visage in the mirror, it means only one thing to me: I'm brushing my teeth and finishing my toilet so I can look like a presentable truck driver.

She stood just a few couple feet out of the kitchen, her hair out and around her shoulders. She had just been complaining to me yesterday that it was too long and difficult to work with, but that the only person that was any good to cut it was tied up for a couple weeks.

“Victor! Quick! I saw something!” The hazel-eyed girl had made some fine spots from the window that she was calling to me from, so I made haste to where she stood.

“In the tree, do you see it?” I peered into the branches trying to spot any color or movement.

“Where is it?” I said. It was at that moment that a striking, small golden-orange-and-black bird flew out of the tree, and then disappeared out of sight.

“It is an oriole!” She was very excited and ran for the bird book that I keep by the window. It's a whipped-on affair that I purchased at the Goodwill.

She stood there in my kitchen, filled with the excitement of that rare bird sighting, all beautiful and barefoot. She read to me the pertinent details about the “Northern Oriole” or what is also called “Bullocks Oriole.” It was on page 426 in *Birds of North America*. My memory is weird like that sometimes.

She had no idea that I had spotted two rare birds that morning. The oriole was striking and spectacular in its winging away, but that girl in the kitchen wasn't one that I would chase after with handfuls of black oil sunflower seeds, greasy suet baskets, and terracotta dishes of water.

I would chase for her with words, and hope that I could get a sighting one more time.

* * *

I Would Try to Write You a Poem

If I could go back to what amounts to a dozen and a half hours ago, and collect up all the petty and mean things I said. If I could gather those words up with my large fingers, pinching up every last one, I would.

“Look under the stove, Vanek,” I would tell myself. Oh yes—there’s a couple words under there.

“Over in the corner, by the bird food, you dope!” I would have to find them all.

After collecting those words in my cupped hands, and being careful that not even one spilled out, I’d take them downstairs to my paper shredder, and render them back into harmless letters.

If I could do that, I would make piles of the letters, separating the vowels from the consonants. I would divide the periods from the exclamation points. You’ve never seen such a pile of exclamation points!

From those neat little piles and rows, I would try to write you a poem.

I’m pretty sure it would be a poor poem, as a man of letters I’m not. But I would be willing to slam my fingers in the door of my little Geo Metro in order to find the inspiration to communicate my self-injurious anguish.

I would walk out into the night, intoxicated, like all those old Chinese hermit poets, and stare at the moon in the water for the inspiration to find a clever way to compare You and That Lunar Body.

I would smell the tiny flowers on the tea rose that I planted for my grandmother when she passed, to remember what beauty is, and to hope for guidance from beyond the grave from that dearly missed old woman.

At best, I’m sure that my poem would have all the radiance of one of those refrigerator light bulbs, a tiny 15-watt tungsten soul burning inside of its transparent body.

I’m sure that my poem would look like someone trying to recreate Michelangelo’s *David* with pipe cleaners and last week’s newspapers.. It would probably look like some crusty impostor trying to imitate those Van Gogh sunflower canvases, with a ham for a brush and blood, saliva and tears for paint.

I’m pretty sure it would be a poor poem. Still, I would try. I would have to use up all of the letters of the spiteful words in order to try to redeem them, and the mouth that said them. *Oh my.*

Think the genie is out of that bottle though. Wishes have gotten used, and now said genie’s got a better gig in Vegas. Now he opens up for those assholes wrangling tigers and lions three days a week. Not going back in the bottle—No, Sir! Not with 365 days of hot- and-cold running swimming pools and 24-hour buffets!

If I could, like an alchemist, put all of those letters in an alembic, add a pinch of sulfur, and a few drops of quicksilver, then apply liberally the ample heat of my shame, maybe I could purify the love I feel for you, from the confusion about the recent events. Mercurial indeed! If I could take the ash of that putrefaction and purification to present to you the true feeling that I have for you, minus all my impotence, I would.

I would give you my truest intent, a purified gift of honest feelings contained in a tiny

decorative gift box. I would offer it up to you, and put my head down before your feet.

If I could write even just a poor poem expressing how that you are like the marrow in my 206 bones (give or take a genetic quirk or whim of God), I would. If only I could write about the transformation that I feel when I lie in bed with you. How my bones turn to steel, and my heart into the best kind of beast, I most certainly would try.

I would write about how the beautiful hive that lies behind my eyes runs like a nitro-methane fueled funny car when you are near.

How the gnarled digits on the ends of my arms become capable of the expressions of affection instead of hanging there in their familiar skeletal fashion.

If I could just go back a dozen and a half hours. Shit—I can't even figure out how to unblock my social media accounts. And I'm pretty sure Vinegar Bob the Academic would just call my poor poem prose. Can't win.

* * * * *



Reneé Schamberger**Easter Island**

I drift
barefoot on the beach
tanned shoulders,
tropical flowers in my hair,
ocean's tongue gently
lapping at my feet.

Sanctuary
from discordant language
this world speaks.

I lip read island's silent sounds
and stare as her stones
begin to sing.

* * *

6 Weeks

I'm drawn to the garden again,
to kneel in fertile soil, a penitent.

My hands toil, untangle weeds,
shelter emerging seedlings,
as I should have protected you.

Fingers touch concave petals,
beg forgiveness of each,
seeking their hollows to know
the curve of your face.

* * *

Letter to _____

I wanted to tell you
that your exit wound
collapsed my world. (and my heart)

I wanted to tell you
about the vertigo I felt
as the gravitational force of you
left my solar system.

Truth is . . .

it was a much smaller thing
than universes and stars.

Truth is . . .

I found your gloves.
In them:
the imprint of your hands

and I wept.

* * * * *





Faceless in the Dark

[Travel Journal]

All day I'd been fasting from food and drink; at three in the afternoon, the headache set in from caffeine withdrawal. I was lying face down, stretched out in the best hammock, wearing a green tunic that Joaquín's wife Maribel had sewn for me. It was like a sleeveless, shin-length t-shirt. Or, admittedly, like a dress. Gervasio had told me the previous year that the Secoyas used to get teased by mestizos about wearing tunics, and they nearly stopped wearing them: but in the 1990s, every Secoya man had a few of them alongside his Western clothes.

Cabaña Supernatura had no walls, just a palm-thatched roof and a floor that was up on posts, three and a half feet off the ground. A cool breeze came from off the river. Most of the family was away. Somewhere upriver, Joaquín was brewing yagé out of vines and leaves with his friend Lázaro, who would drink with us.

After urging Joaquín for a couple of weeks to conduct another ceremony, the day had arrived and I was apprehensive, dreading the awful taste in the mouth and the vomiting. I turned my head and complained to Joaquín's twelve-year-old grandson Luis, who was walking by: "Poor me."

"Why?"

"I'm going to drink yagé tonight."

The boy laughed. He'd never tried yagé and had no plans to. We exchanged a few more words and he wandered off to play soccer with his brother and sister.

I recalled a conversation with the boy's father, Joaquín's son Rufino. "In the past," Rufino had told me, "boys sampled it at about nine years of age, just a little at first."

"And girls?" I asked.

"It wasn't as essential for girls. After my father was orphaned, he learned to drink it under the guidance of his mother's parents, who were both shamans, and he began healing when he was about fifteen. But then when Protestant missionaries from the United States came into Secoya territory, they prohibited shamanism and the yagé ceremony."

"From the United States?" I remembered Gervasio telling me this. A curious connection between here and my home country. First some gringos come to prohibit shamanism, then another comes to study it.

"Yes, they were members of the Summer Institute of Linguistics."

"I've heard of them," I said. "Jesus wanted everyone have a chance to hear his gospel, so they go around the world translating the Bible into various languages for small tribes and then getting them to be Christian."

"That's right. My mother had begun her training as a shaman. Her older brother Francisco was teaching her. He was the last shaman-chief of our group. One day she was talking to Señora Barclay, the missionary, about Jesus, and Señora Barclay told her to pray to him and ask him to wash away her sins. My mother only wanted Jesus to be another helping

spirit for her. That's why she prayed to him. But when she did, she really felt that Jesus washed away her sins, and after that, she didn't need shamanism any more, and she never went back to it.

"When she was a shaman, she could heal people just by putting her hands on them. She can still do that as a Christian, it's just that it's Jesus who gives her the power now.

"There are no apprentice shamans among the Secoyas these days. The young people aren't interested. We're teaching them to read and write and deal with the outside world."

Now, I closed my eyes. Nearby, in the trees by the Aguarico River, black and yellow oropendola birds were singing a sad, liquid tune.

It was dark when Joaquín and Lázaro arrived and I was confused by sleep. The two men bore flashlights and spoke jovially in their alien tongue. In my dreams, I'd been far away. Now I was in a laughing darkness, unsure of the order in which things would happen. I sat up in the hammock, collected my thoughts, waited. The family was bedding down for the night in the enclosed room at the other end of the hut; a Secoya schoolteacher and his son were also staying the night, getting settled under mosquito netting in the dining area.

Faceless in the dark, Joaquín bustled over and handed me a flashlight; a tin-framed, rectangular mirror; and a seedpod of achioté to be used as a pigment. "You can paint your face now," he said. I cracked open the soft, spiky pod, worked a finger into the moist, red, pungent juice around the seeds, and applied a standard, basic yagé drinker's design: a spot on each cheek, and one spot each on the chin, tip of the nose, and forehead.

Lázaro kindled a fire of palm wood on a wide metal plate that rested on three squat ceramic pillars on the floor. I wrapped myself in a blanket and reclined in a hammock; Joaquín and Lázaro were side by side in the one I'd been sleeping in before, facing opposite directions, Lázaro closer to the fire. This was the first time I'd seen him. He seemed in his late fifties, a decade younger than Joaquín, with a big jaw and squinty eyes. Unlike the cheerful Joaquín, he didn't speak to me. He seemed uncommunicative. He made me nervous.

In front of Lázaro were two plastic jugs, one filled with yagé, the other with water; and two plastic cups, one for yagé, and one for water to rinse out the mouth.

I let my eyes close. I heard Lázaro unscrewing the cap from the jug of yagé. The sound of the cap being placed on a floorboard. The sound of liquid pouring into a plastic cup. I watched Lázaro as the strange man held the green cup in his hands. Praying, he sang; singing, he chanted: a pagan priest consecrating a sacrament. It was intense and serious and went on for about five minutes. He fell silent and drained the cup. He rinsed his mouth with water from the other cup and leaned over and spat the water into a crack between floorboards. He poured yagé and prayed over it for Joaquín, and lastly did the same for me. I silently thanked the creator of the earth and sky for this moment and for the yagé.

The taste was even worse than I'd remembered, instantly nauseating. I fought my way to the bottom of the cup. They'd brewed it thick. I rinsed my mouth, lay back, tried to move as little as possible. Rested for an hour, calm, bored, praying for good visions and the power to heal, unable to sleep, listening to the night sounds and the sporadic conversation of the shamans, wishing I could speak their language.

I looked for alteration in my vision and thought and found none. Lázaro chanted. The voice made me uncomfortable. It sounded less human than Joaquín's; less mammalian, even: it contained pitches and rhythms of insect songs.

Lázaro buzzed to a stop, chatted with Joaquín, and prayed over and drank another cup;

offered me another, which I accepted. Another uneventful hour passed and I drank a third. I felt the yagé building up like water behind a dam, and eventually was given a fourth cup. Now I was shivering, waiting for the dam to break. Feeling cold and electrified, I shook violently, rocking forward and backward in the hammock.

At last a pale blue arabesque arises from the droning buzz of the nearby cicadas. I relax as I focus on it. Each graphic element within the pattern of this visualized song seems to contain a different piece of information.

Lázaro chants like a cricket, very fast. In the near darkness, now that the fire has died down, his face blurs, half cricket, half pattern of sounds like blue-green fan corals floating and shifting in the air. Joaquín sings now too, as if he were an old scat singer, improvising riffs on ancient melodies. He's been doing this for nearly sixty years and he sings the syllables with a fluent beauty. From time to time one or another of the uncucuis breaks off singing to mimic a howler monkey or a jaguar, a sudden *HUH! HUH! HUH!* or *HRRR!* in the common language of the mammal tribe. Now Joaquín picks up a mamecóc and shakes it for rhythm and to move energy. It's like the wind rustling leaves, fast, over and over.

A rumble in my stomach leads to pain. The yagé appears as a huge blue snake squirming wildly in my belly. The pain makes me cry out. I wail in anguish like a child, then climb a hill of pain and shout in triumph, then slide back down. The pain becomes extreme. I've never felt this much before. It's as if I've been poisoned and I'm dying. I writhe in the hammock like a fish in a net or a butterfly trying to shake off its chrysalis.

I keep the yagé in as long as possible while it extracts its price, the tax on transformation. Its price is pain and I'm willing to pay. Congealed sorrow that's been stored in my lower back since my parents divorced is getting shaken out like dust from a carpet. As I scream, Joaquín and Lázaro build a brilliant wall of song nearby from their shamanic spaceship hammock, a song that says to me perfectly clearly, "You're doing fine. We've been there too."

*A crescendo of pain,
gripping, whirling, killing,
infinite pain, insane,
breaks me at last
and explodes out my mouth;
at that moment
my cries turn to roars
of ecstatic victory.
It's like smashing through a magic mirror
or passing through a lens that turns everything upside-down:
the pleasure that follows the breaking point
is exactly as strong as the pain that preceded it.*

Death itself must be like that. So I have nothing to fear, now or ever. I roar with the strongest joy imaginable. With the piney-smelling vomit pooled on the floorboards inches from my face, I scream, my body facing the floor, swaying, just my head out of the hammock, looking at the upside-down world in darkness. Now's the time to growl, no human language needed, now's the time to howl, to pound on the floor, imagining enemies.

I lie back in the hammock, my body humming like a well-tuned machine. At home

on the earth I sing *Ommmm . . . home . . . hey hey hey hey . . .* With simple sounds I evoke the growth of plants, the birth of stars, the alliances between rainforest peoples and outsiders, and the joy that must follow death. When I get back I'll tell my mother about this, and the rest of my family too. Then they won't fear death anymore.

I'm silent now, listening to Lázaro and Joaquín singing different songs at the same time. Complex patterns of sound waves mix with the vibrations of cicadas, crickets, tree frogs peeping in the woods.

I listen to the silence of the uncucuis and to the peaceful song of the forest night.

The two older men sit up in their hammock, their legs in opposite directions, and converse. Lázaro pours, chants a magic spell, drinks another cup of the potion. To me he says, "You want another?"

"Yes." I watch while Lázaro pours, prays, passes it to me. Horrible glittering holy yagé, welcome to my body, even as I shudder as I drink.

Since I'm sitting up, I feed the fire, blow on it, get it going again. Smoke blows back in my face, hot, bitter, choking. I lie back in the hammock, swaying. Along my jaw, my fingers explore razor stubble, twelve o'clock shadow. Thoughts lead to thoughts and I wonder how the U.S. military mission in Haiti is going. A newspaper article I read in town a week ago said the death toll on the U.S. side was up in the twenties. Now I see the dead ones marching, thirty yards southwest of the hut, lost among planes of darkness in the roadless jungle of the night. Some houngan must have cast a spell on the souls to mess up their sense of direction. And they've found out what they wondered all their lives: what it is to die. I sing to them,

*Now you know,
now you know.
Honor the fallen soldiers.
We wish you well.*

Immediately they've taken refuge in my stomach and I know I'm going to throw up.

I sing to the dead soldiers that their country's proud of them and their families love them. And that later on I'll die too.

*We all die,
we all die,
we all die.*

A peaceful, deathlike calm floats over and around my body. I lie without moving, practicing to be dead, rocking gently back and forth in the hammock like a hanged man swayed by the wind.

When we agreed to be born, we agreed to die. When we drank the cup of life, we drank the cup of death.

Although I have no fear of death now, I know it may return. Fear and pain guard the life of the body.

The oscillation of pleasure and pain creates the rhythm of life. The highs and the lows need each other and give way to each other.

When I was younger, I used to get stuck in the lows and think they'd never end. Partly

because the younger we are, the slower time goes by, and partly because I hadn't lived through enough of that wavelike motion to recognize it.

I flash back to a graffito I saw in Quito: *Out of the shit rises a sun, and a flower is born.* The Quito graffito refutes my G-I-G-O (Garbage-In-Garbage-Out) Theory of human psychology. In fact, the garbage that goes in can be compost. Light can feed on darkness.

That's like the Buddhist image of the mind as a lotus rooted in muck and making its way up through the water toward the sun until it reaches the surface and can blossom: enlightenment.

Joaquín or Lázaro clears his throat loudly.

Death is present, holding hands with life, giving a strange comfort, a strange love.

I contemplate the physical process of dying of torture or illness. The body undergoes its changes as the flesh is attacked. The soul endures these horrors until they become too much for it and it recoils from the body. The stronger the pain before death, it seems, the stronger the joy afterwards. I suddenly understand torture as a transmission of energy from the victim to the perpetrator. And while the torturer is preparing a blissful afterlife for his victim, he's winding up a brutal backlash for himself in this life and the next.

There's silence, there's cricket song. What's it like to be dead, anyway? Once, in a dream, I met my friend Verge Basso. He'd died a year earlier. A promising young writer, charismatic and witty, afraid of his sadistic tendencies in the same way I was. He'd been kayaking alone on a river in New Zealand without a helmet and he smacked his head on a stone and drowned. The body and the kayak floated out to a bay, where they were recovered. Verge was 21.

In the dream I run into him in the basement of a nightclub in Chicago. We embrace, a dead man and a live man. We've missed each other. We go outside to talk.

I ask him to tell me something I couldn't possibly know—a family secret or something—so I can get in touch with his parents and his sister and prove to them that I've actually met him.

He winces. I understand the rules forbid him from contacting his family this way, though he'd like to. But he tells me something else.

He says that for a week after he died, he ate cabbage and the tops of waves on the river where he'd drowned.



The cicadas start up again. Or had I just forgotten them? I hum, wondering about the birth and death of the universe. I fall silent, agnostic. What are the shamans seeing?

Joaquín coughs and begins a song, tentatively at first, then stronger. He's told me it's his job to protect his people with his song, his magic, his prayer. Demons—a metaphor?—can't stand the sound of it and flee back to their hell-realms below.

After a while my soldier-ghost-filled stomach churns and I know it's only a matter of time.

The waves of nausea come closer together now, and stronger. I'm singing hard, trying to persuade my body to keep the yagé down, knowing it's hopeless. Then the waves of pain break over me and I cry out, then I'm singing again, knowing I'm going to feel a lot worse before I feel better. Nine people are more or less asleep within earshot, and while it's fine to roar, howl, scream, yell as necessary, it feels important to sound good while doing so. I think about the people thinking about me, I see them seeing my face in the darkness, and I reassure them with my song that I'm all right.

No, I'm not all right. I'm losing it. A horrible groan rips from my lips, and in a moment I'm puking again, as inevitable as death. It's strong, my whole body bucks, my eyes must be squirting tears. Cleaner inside to start with, I'm not roaring as much, but I feel like I'm staring through the earth into outer space. The fingers of one hand grip the webbing of the hammock, the other hand braces against the floor as I spit out the last of the yagé—*Ptah!* Empty but convulsed by dry heaves, I shout *Dau! Huh huh huh HUH! HRR!* I cough and spit again and lie back feeling lighter. Rocking, I sing gently *Haaa* to signal that I'm at peace and that rage is a gift that must be used only for good. *Hey . . .* the defense of peaceful communities. *Hmmm . . .* healing and the color green. *Heyy . . .* the sound of sunlight. *High*, the blue sky. *Ha, ha, ha . . .* the pleasure of being alive. I mix a song from shining fragments of words and sounds that tumble out in all colors; I sing really well, then falter; try to regain the magic, fail, and subside. I remember something funny that happened in ninth grade, and laugh and laugh. Then there's silence again.

Lázaro sings his funny insect song, Joaquín's pensive, and I laugh, Joaquín sings, shaking his leaf fan, and I hum along, wishing I could sing like him. I'm grateful to the shamans and their ancestors for their songs of freedom and redemption. Later, Lázaro gives me more yagé, and later still I throw it up again, the vision machine humming around me, painting intricate colored patterns in the black air. Even later, we all sing together, and it's like flying through clouds.

I ponder the connections I've been making with the people here in Latin America. We're like neurons linking up to each other. Humanity's like a brain learning to communicate between its diverse parts. I feel now that despite my earlier reluctance, my place in society will include work in education.

I dig cross-cultural communication because I'm a child of several cultures myself, born in the USA, my mom Irish-American, my dad Jewish-American of Russian and Polish provenance. Without cross-cultural communication my mind feels like a muttering wasteland haunted by enemy tribes—or like the courtroom where the two people I loved most struggled to destroy each other for reasons I've never been able to fathom.

This impulse to cross cultures may come not from us as individuals but from the soul of our species. The spirit of humanity itself brought my parents together. And then drove them apart? But I had been created. And then I was broken open. To take up the tasks of our species.

Like the artist work of observing and articulating. This sense organ work for the collective body.

A distant roar of howler monkeys in the jungle to the south sounds like a storm on the ocean, or like a choir of distant ancestors telling me to have courage.

His reptilian, narrow-eyed, big-jawed face expressionless, Lázaro rises lightly with his leaf fan from the hammock he shares with Joaquín and begins to dance up and down in the deep blue pre-dawn light—marching forward, stepping backward, shaking the fresh green mamecoco so it says *sh-sh-sh-sh-sh-sh-sh*. He reminds me of a pterodactyl. I lie there eyeing him, thinking, *This is weird. Truly, deeply, embarrassingly weird.* But the following evening, Joaquín will ask, *Did you see how beautifully he danced? And did you see the sky people dancing alongside him? So many of them, like leaves! And so beautiful!*

Soon a couple roosters begin to crow, and dawn light seeps into the tunics, Lázaro's yellow, Joaquín's orange, and my green. I note that both men's red achiote facepaint designs are intact. On my own face, the marks I applied last night must be smeared. Lázaro turns and belches loud and strong in the direction of the forest. The sound of it overwhelms me with nausea. I double over with dry heaves, gagging, gut-wrenched. I'm utterly thirsty. The Café Trieste looks really good right now. I wish I were sucking down a raspberry Italian soda.

I'm OK, though. I sigh and smile and lie back again, calm. Lázaro and Joaquín joke with me, broad smiles and laughter all around. Joaquín's relaxed, bemused, legs crossed at the ankles. He usually reminds me of a Tibetan lama, but his current smile is just like that of a different visionary, the Belgian Surrealist painter René Magritte.

Lázaro takes a long swig of yagé directly from the jug. Watching him do this nauseates me again, and I belch, turn over in the hammock, put my head out, and throw up a little on the floor. I stay where I am, perfectly comfortable, and watch the pool of yagé as some of it begins to slip slowly down between two floorboards. I study the curving chainsaw pattern of the boards, and the tiny, white saliva bubbles like insect eggs atop the thick brown liquid.

I hear the sleepers rising in the other part of the hut. Joaquín, who's drunk less than Lázaro or me, converses with them. I shift my head and watch, for a long time, the upside-down jungle, and the way the breeze picks out certain leaves to caress while leaving others unmoved. Huge, upright leaves of banana plants, transfixed bright green by the morning sun, rock back and forth. I study the clean clothes hanging on the wire clothesline outside, and the flight paths of small birds as they zoom by, little more than blurs. I can see how this kind of patient observation would be useful to rainforest people—a profound contemplation of the environment.

The Rorschach of a patch of bark on a tree near the hut resolves into the image of the poet Walt Whitman from the frontispiece of *Leaves of Grass*, half-smiling, under a jauntily-cocked broad-brimmed hat; only the features on the face are mine.

An immense black beetle buzzes joyfully through the hut.

I lie back in the hammock chatting with Joaquín and Lázaro. My whole body feels good. From the dining area, the schoolteacher, drinking a cup of coffee, regards me intently. His son's wary of me, remembering my wild roars. Two of Joaquín's grandchildren, Luís and Xiomara, smile at me, proud of my fortitude. And Joaquín's wife Maribel beams her gorgeous grin and sits down with a kitchen knife to pare her nails.

* * * * *



Raymond Soulard, Jr.



Many Musics

Ninth Series

"Open hands, touch, & teach others how"

li. Yesterday is Everything

*"To dwell is to leave a trace."
—Jorie Graham*

Once. Twice. Breathe. Relax.
Let history's testament fall to sand.
Let the trail of old blood diminish away.
Let deepest love cup, not contain, & thus
learn by release. *Breathe. Relax.*

A dream. My brother & I building a wall,
a construction in words, languages old
like frail, warm skin; others newer, glowing
with seed, humming, partway back to stars.
I pause my work, larving up syllables &
stones, look up, see your laughing face,
the many of you I've known. Common despair.

Once. Twice. Breathe. Relax.
Let the stars between dull hours be more to guide.
Let our humility sup on every beast & bug
& vine & stone & new song we aren't.
Let the gorgeous rubble of dream become
more the tale we yearn to tell.

We begin to travel along this wall,
find crevasses to hold to as more time
passes than ought, years for days, centuries,
we cling to this wall as it drives furiously
through history. It's an ugly wall to fast
to, colored like old blood, & its path goes
jagged & uncertain. Loses faith, as old things
do. My brother won't let go me, the path,
till I make him do. *Let me go.*

Once. Twice. Breathe. Relax.
 Let the kind hours explain the world to you.
 Twining fingers, silver falls of leaves,
 meals desperate & late & fine.
 There was an hour when you could've flown,
 did.
I'll keep singing this.

When I let go of the wall, I wake
 to my chamber. I'm alone. Shoulder aches.
 The brother of my dream is the mutt suddenly
 at my door. His ragged fur, sloppy tongue,
 excited breathing in my face. "I want
 to tell us both this story, if you'll listen."
 His tail wags, a yes, or maybe he just
 loves me.

lii. Dreaming Coming Stars

"Cease the tide by cursing the moon?
 Crush the drum heads, men will pound their
 stones, twice harder!
 Bind a woman's fire & she will lay dreaming
 coming stars!"

Everyone laughs. The King in good spirits.
 A fairly calm sea. The Island near or
 soon will be.

I pet your shaggy head. My brilliant fool.
 You enjoy being a dog, permission to feel
 everything in a moment. Piss freely.

"What his crew didn't know was that
 the King had contacted my brother,
 Benny. Traveler in dreams. *You*. I think."

Or some kind of you. An herb he drank
 later that night, kind of a poison,
 but if survived enough, a deeper entry
 to Dreamland. Passage, movement.

He bid his brothers good night & they
 drank on till very late. His mood
 gave them hope.

You'd had none till the last meeting with
 the Travelers before setting off. Convinced
 you'd only find your beloved via dreamways,
 you'd promised them a more honored
 place in your future kingdom. The Island
 would ever welcome Travelers. For the herb.

Now I writhe in my bed, poison drunk
 in my belly, a cloth stuffed in my
 mouth so none may hear my cries. I have
 to survive death, alone, uncomforted,
 & the door will open. Strange, there
 are two. I choose the one to dreams
 this time.

You begin to doze, lazy, know this tale,
 both, either. "It was you allowed him
 his grief, his absolute despair. She saw, finally,
understood, that yours was to find the Island,
find the Tangled Gate. Yours was to save
 the world." I shake my head, seeing again
 mutt where I saw my King. I'd served
 no man till I knew you. None since.
 Knowing your grief better than you did, why it so,
 it carved my heart a groove close by yours.

"There will be two," you told me that night,
 when he let us alone, King & his Queen
 together a last time. "Give all to the one
 who comes to you first by the sea.
 Having done so, the second will come to you,
 & you may grow old finally." Kissed him last as wife.

You tire of my Tower & want to run.
 I let you chase from my offices outdoors,
 my day & night without end, my gift from her.

I walk more stiffly than I once did,
 the Architect grows old too, eventually.
 But each time you visit, Benny, each time
 I am able to form you mutt at least,
 when I cannot form a man, I reck your
 sacrifice anew, that it was you who must keep her
 till the last, you who salved & broke the King's heart,
 finally, so he would let go, & save the world.

liii. Between the Night & Day

Between the night & day without end
 that you gifted me, a dusk, a dawn,
 where I love you still.

What leaves last, if leaves at all,
 are the smaller things, cooler moments
 when we simply shared space.

When you studied the Tangled Gate through
 my Tower office telescope, you wouldn't
 breathe. I'd listen from across the shadowy
 spectres of the room. Not a breath.
 You'd move the glass, inch by inch,
 study the maps, move some more,
 testing what you saw with what you
 encountered in Dreamland. A sudden connection,
 now a breath. Knowing it wouldn't be
 in that spot next time, *knowing it*,
 the Gate was like that. *Still*.

You left little scent those many years.
 Any man would have sniffed after you, the King's
 ripening daughter, but little to compare
 with girls who vied in your shadow, it's like
 you disappeared in your departures. Remained
 in more obscure ways.

It was your passion to know your own
 truths that riven through me even now.
 How did I come to know what you were,
 when were you more than beautiful, lonely,
 & too intelligent Princess to me? Was it
 before or after I let you escape the Island?

I had chased across centuries to find
 a way to save the world. And it was you.
 I believed you were from another place,
 had come here, & the world of men aborn.

And then I learned my own story too.
 I was from that far place, from Emandia,
 as well. We had been landed on far ends
 of the story. Yours to grow with the world,
 find its beauties, mine to review its finale.

I love you still. We were both contrived
 for our tasks, however different.
 An attraction set along our border
 to assure we'd find each other,
 the eros between us the sparkling fuel
 by which we'd know the right world
 true, & no others, & move on bloodless otherwise.

My mutt won't come near me when
 my dusky walk emits like this one.
Contrivances aren't suppose to love
each other. Why do these dusks & dawns
 disturb me more? What is missing?

I love you still. I sit in my office,
 now, tonight, & I look over to my old
 telescope, perpetually pointed to the Gate,
 whatever world. I see you there, now,
 tonight, breathless, studying, studying,
 & I am breathless too, I was then,
 & you are so close, I've come the world
 & its centuries to be in this room with you.
 Why can't I stand? Why can't I approach you,
 to explain what I know, what I don't,
 & present myself to your womanly gaze,
 for your womanly assessment, & perhaps
 a shy smile, & again a breath, scent of aster.



liv. Scent of Aster (Other Beauties)

We came from Emandia via deeper dreaming
 through the Red Bags. You & I were
 one man, brother, Benjamin, Benny, compelled
 from one trunk to two branches, two men.
 I to the building, what they sneering called
 architecting, of the world of men. Sneering
 because despair, because too many failed
 worlds. Because only madness builds
 again & again, same hands, same tools,
 same materials, & smiling expects
 a novel result. You were the *but*, Benny,
 the wild card in me extracted to run free.

You laughed, you raced us up hills,
 climbed the tallest trees, led the songs
 wherever we traveled & invited to a meal
 & a fire. Your shoulders strong, your body
 as broad & dense as mine lanky, divided
 even between your deep shouts & love of
 open woods & my retreat to murk & thick books.
 You didn't know we were twain for purpose,
 by day, by night, by sun, by moon, by waking,
 by sleep. We receded from each other slowly,
 a breath, an untwined finger at a time.

Perhaps it began with your discontent
 with lovers. No matter how she approached,
 shy, brusk, a girl for the gentle slow taking
 or one to bind or be bound by leather rags,
 heated with claws or serrated blade, you fretted
 & hurried too soon from her. *Flaws, always flaws*
 you saw in each girl or woman. The shade
 of a cheek, the roundness of a breast,
 the want to be solely, wildly possessed, the growl
 for you & a dozen other heavy-cocked men
 in their turn. *Flaws, always flaws.*

You dreamed more. We ceased our travels
 because you liked the strange pale woods
 we had come. "There are other beauties
 than the ones we have known," you'd say
 to me, often, like a prayer, like a tic.
 Kept me near for when you woke,
 witness to your half-mumbled visions,
 convinced there was an inner space
 shared by all, a perfect world, a *Dreamland*,
 did you contrive it yourself? Did it contrive
 you? I would try to tell you what we were
 but you smiled like it didn't matter.
 I asked you, "What other beauties?" &
 you said, "Come with me, brother,
 let's make them together, forever!"

And then you were gone. Gone to Dreamland,
become Dreamland. I was alone in your
 pale woods. I could no more find you
 while asleep than awake. What did this
 mean? Our trunk was reft.

Eventually I mourned & let you go.
 I stopped looking for you in my dreams
 & began shaping tools there to bring back,
 building tools, tools to fix the flaws
 in the world. A world demur enough
 to make men want to defend & protect
 her every breath & bloom. A world
 growling powerful enough to twist their greed,
 to conquer & tame, twist it crying in
 their minds, come for me now, *come for me*,
 your miracle world, its every beauty,
 & release. *Come again*, & release.

It was near the end of the world when
 you finally let us meet again. I was come
 in Dreamland to an old memory of
 our pale woods, where I lost you.
 I was leaving in the morning to travel
 back the years to the Island, Tangled Gate,
 find & fix the flaws. Hopeless, a woman's scent
 in my mind still. Tired, her embrace
 easy cost to let this next imperfect world go.

Came bounding up to me, barking,
 joyous, wet-tongued, ugly beautiful
 mutt & you, *you*, Benny! Barks, licks,
 pants, what you could give me
 to hold of you, so I would not ask your
 help mending the flaws, so if I failed
 I did with your love & no more.
 I held you, hugged you, worried to your
 glory my long fingernails in your shaggy
 fur. Woke with your scent in my nose,
 my cheeks drying from your many kisses.

I left for the Island, the Gate,
 & willing forgot you until later,
 until I was retired here, day & night
 forever, & when we met it was
 in waking this time. I had nothing
 left to ask of you. You still came as mutt,
 & neither of us pressed man from you.

Perhaps where my discontent. Perhaps
 I want you man not mutt in my arms?
 Perhaps begin our travels anew,
 having saved this world, flaws & all,
 our turn together again? You sniff,
 you bark, you lick. Pee & roll happily in shit.
 I want other beauties than these, brother,
 scent of aster in my mind. Your old laughter too.

lv. Deeper Creature Time (i)

“Deeper Creature time,” he writes,
 finding his old notes ledger &
 resuming a fresh page. “Looking for
 a gape in my world, I keep thinking
 about this, about how little I know
 about it.

“They weren’t from Emandia as we were.
 They were native to this world, the Island,
 its White Woods. Endless, pathless White Woods.”

Pauses. Looks around the nearly ageless
 dank of his office. Its books piled high,
 containers of herbs & potions, trinkets
 from the many places & times he'd
 travelled. Smells of decay dried to dust.
 His desk really a great table,
 covered too but for the area before him,
 cleared away periodically.

Himself dressed in soft rags, noone to show
 for, shine for, bother about. His body
 nearly immortal but old with patina,
 time & sadness.

Resumes. Struggles. "Or maybe it should
 be called Deeper Creature timelessness.
 For they do not live with awareness
 of time. Shackled to its passing &
finitude. For them, *there is no time*."

Nods. "Theirs is an existence outside time's
 passing, like my own, but that they
 aren't even aware of time. I am.
 I am made by hands, yet *I am a man*."

Picks up his ledger & on a whim brings
 it to the Tower office's front window,
 near to his great spy-glass & thick maps
 of the Tangled Gate. *Where she'd sat*.
 He sniffs, can't help himself. Just memories.

Table not a quarter the size of his own,
 he moves things around, settles in.
 Dust, displaced, stays displaced, awake
 again, wondering.

And, there below, the Gate? This still
 the Island? & that yet the Gate?

He mulls. This discontent won't salve itself,
 nor will sitting in this office do any better.
 The Gate?

Nothing to lose but his loneliness.
 Stands, looks around, finds his long
 unworn overcoat. Feels odd,
 like he won't be back here a long while,
 like it's time. For me, *there is time*.
 At least for now.

lvi. Deeper Creature Time (ii)

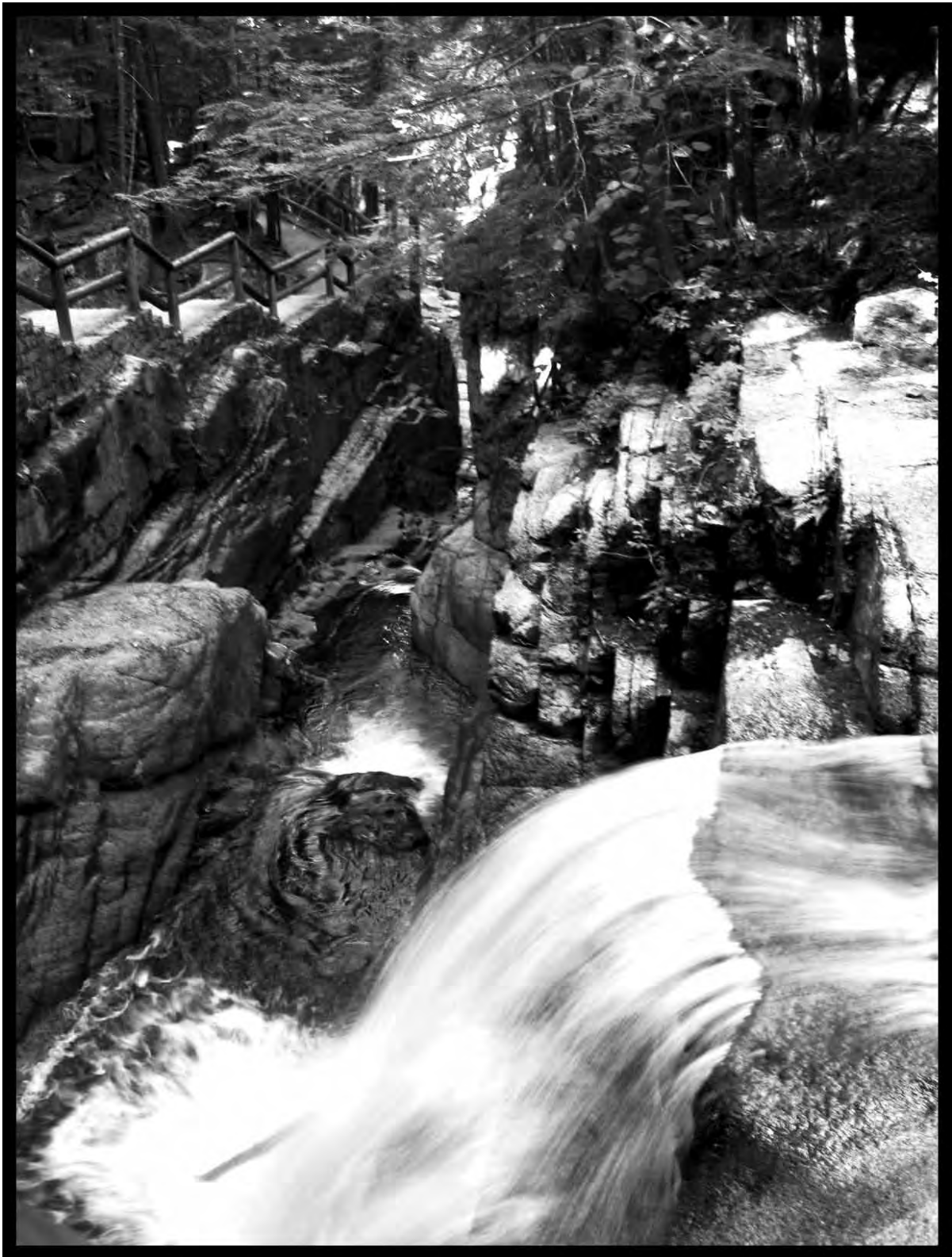
The Gate never changes. So massively
 tall, & its legend where its scrollwork peaks:
 “*For those lost.*”

I enter & there is the Fountain,
 perpetually crumbling yet ever gushing,
 insisting a drink. A drink, & a choice.
 I briefly consider declining but
 realize *I need the Gate's help*.
 Whatever that might be, I need it.

So I take my two-handed scoop of
 the cold, tingling water, music to taste,
 water to listen to? Drink it down deep,
 & move past the Fountain.

They knew me once. We became friends
 & together helped the Princess succeed.
 How do I reach them now? Remember
 my old advice to her, tap my head once,
 my heart once, sniff twice, & begin to
 follow somewhat seeming random
 paths of vines & stones. Sky above
 a murky grey. My breath slows nicely,
 I feel my body in a less heavy way.

But eventually I slow, frustrated.
 It is possible to fail & exit the Gate
 a failure? Why this quick to quit in me?



Come on. "*Come on!*" I begin to call,
wordlessly, call & call, I cry &
howl, moan unto *hmmmmmm*, summon
all the hope & hopeful purpose I have.
Come on. "*Come on!*"

Softly, at first, then again a little louder,
something echoes through the air &
through my mind, a cackle, another,
many cackles! Swooping & swirling
around me, ringing, echoing, echoing,
then echoing the echoes, it cannot be but
my old friend the wee Imp! Can it be?
It must.

lvii. Deeper Creature Time (iii)

The cackles continue their echoing
play, & I follow. Follow, & yet no
closer. I must faster. *I must play.*

I think of old times, the White Bunny,
& I try. Long ears, glowing fur, pink nose,
nothing. *Nothing.* Still man-shaped.

Man . . . shaped. Not thinking at all,
this is my body's turn to do. I sleek
down, not quite a bunny, or an imp,
but a creaturely form all my own,
what I might have been I now am,
for this little while. Listen close, I speed.

The cackles triple with delight, *this*
is their Architect *come to play!*
They direct me, a long tunnel of dancing
cackles, & I follow, I speed like
no man has, man I am, man I'm not.

Speed till I slow, slow sudden
to stop. A cave. *This cave.*
I know it. The Beast long lived here.

The cackles are urging me on in,
 but I remain still. The Beast is
 of forces deeper than my knowledge or skill.
 The Beast is this world itself, given
 a body to roam it, a mind to reckon
 itself & all dwelling on it.

I kneel. I kneel very low toward
 the Cave & its possible inhabitant.
 I speak quietly, scrub a man's natural
 arrogance before his world, his hand's
 & eye's & mind's & throat's raw power,
 & I speak from my long loneliness
 & yearning.

"My friend brought me here. She
 urges me to pass. She is a Creature,
 & travels to her home. I am a man,
 of a kind, & wish to visit, with my
 questions. I ask your leave for
 safe passage. Perhaps there is still
 good in me to do others."

Upon my last words, & only these,
 a breath, a stirring, the sounds
 of something unearthed from dug &
 tossed rock. Something emits the Cave.

I stand. Approach. No. Yes. *Tis*. The blue bag
 I gave the Princess long ago. Whole &
 handled still. The Cave says nothing more
 but I sniff twice & feel my entry allowed.
 Realize myself still in Creaturely form as
 I make to pick up the bag with swift
 but clumsy paws. Regret, but reform.

About to revisit its contents, curious
 what remains, but the cackles sudden
 everywhere, high & low, they practically
 push me into the Cave, carrying
 my old bag unopened for now. Well.

Man again, I move at my own swift
 speed now. I feel more myself as this
 latter-day adventure continues, uncertain
 but burbling. Thinking me ready for
 anything.

No. And not. I come of a sudden into
 the too bright central cavern of these
 caves & tunnels, & for a lingering moment
 as I stop, crouch, choke my breath
 & beat still, I hear the scraping stones,
 bare feet upon stones, bare feet dancing,
 dancing, a lithe body conjuring song from
 patterns & dreams. My heart stops. I fall away.

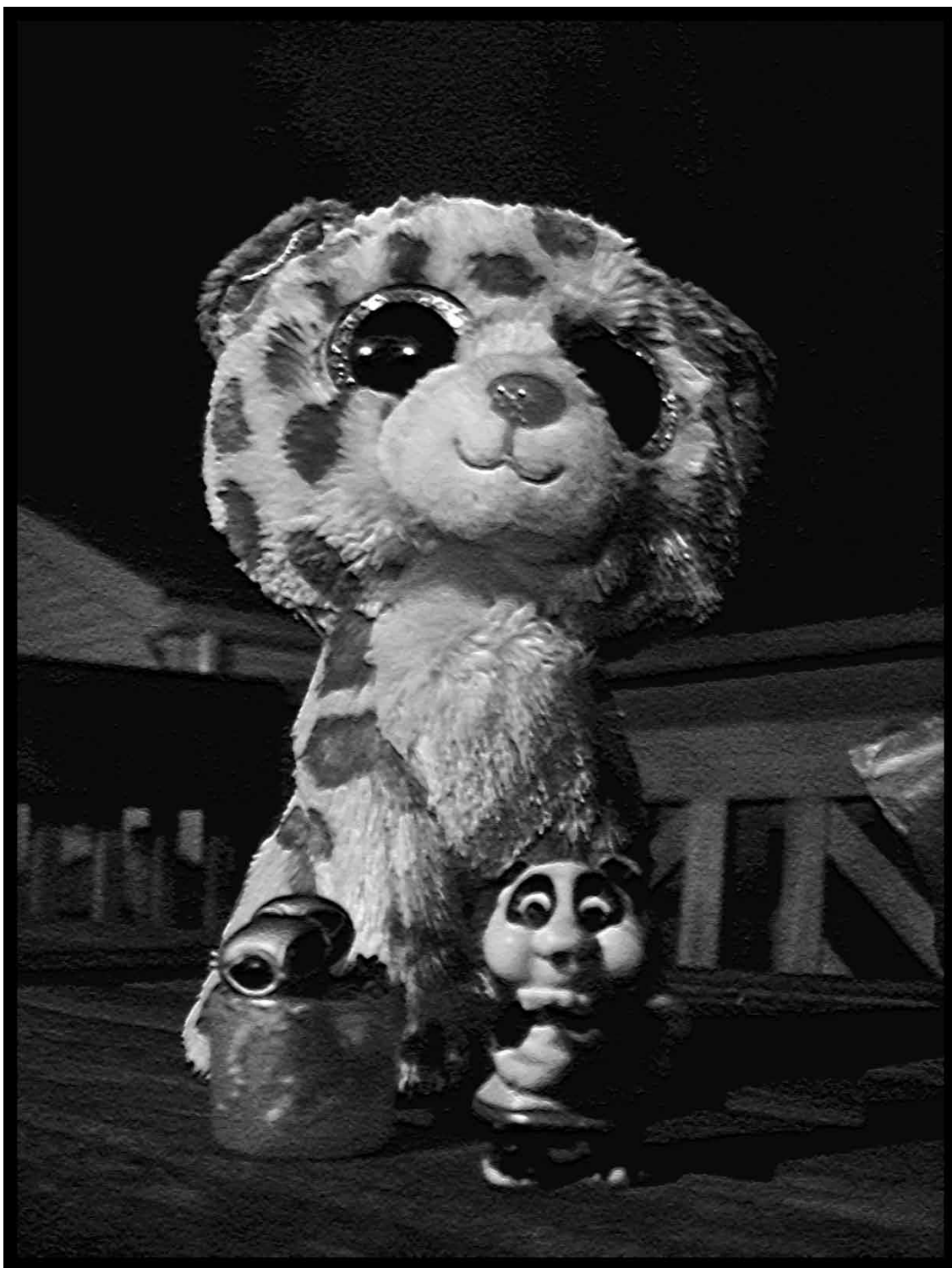
lviii. Deeper Creature Time (iv)

When I come to, I am aloft, but back
 in the tunnel I emerged from. My form
 changed to, *ah*, I am again Hummingbird
 like when I first met her along paths of
 the Gate!

I'm afraid. She dances happily with
 the Creatures, she's found her content.
 She gifted me my Tower, day & night
 without ending, & I've balked.
 Dissatisfy with retiring quietly to a drawer,
 a man-shaped tool plied, & done.

I flit, flit some more, find myself falling
 into these pleasures. Remember
 to listen with ears & there are still
 cackles around me, waiting,
 now nudging a little, *come along*,
Hummingbird! New play! New play!

Enter the great cavern again, inured
 to its bright light now, & see
 the Princess has concluded her
 solitary dance & now every Creature
 big & small joins in her frolic.



Many of the major Bears in
 this number, little ones too,
 even wee ones & their oddest of noises
 make me think of the Imp somehow.
 Several Giraffes, a grey Hedgehog,
 the White Bunny! So many more.

I join. Before I can think to think,
 or choose to choose, I join in &
 dance. Flitter high & low, feel out
 the song they sing, find my voice
 among the many others, & join
 in too. Like I belong. *I belong.*

My form shifts, unknowing to me,
 slowly, I become less Hummingbird
 & more the Creaturely form I'd chose
 to chase the cackles, swift & sleek,
 but then less this than a man's form,
 my form, still dancing, still singing.
 Still smiling among all these old friends.

When the singing crescendos to its slow close,
 I feel crowds of Creatures dividing in twain before me
 as I half intentioned, nudged & nudged
 by cackles, by clicks-clicks & noise-noises too
 now, I arrive, fully formed man,
 the dance & song finished, I arrive
 to the shocked, smiling, beautiful face
 of my long-beloved Princess. *Oh my.*

lix. Deeper Creature Time: Grand Production!

"We are and are not."
 —*Heraclitus*

Your smile holds me from falling,
 keeps me from fleeing. Your hair as red
 as always, as long, your eyes still
 a faerie blue, but nothing to your smile
 as you slow me enough to rest, not pause,
 in my place. Your smile the sum
 of what all these years have not been.
 Your smile sups upon me until I am
 well-chewed, swallowed, expelled back
 to myself as this calm reunion's moment.

"You came."
 "You . . . called?"
 She nods, steps forward, & grasps
 my hand. "It was time."

I feel something wordless, something
 I do not know, good or bad? I don't
 know. Look down. Our hands, as
 they keep grasping, meld to one.

I gasp. Begin to laugh. Still holding her,
 our hand, I lean over & laugh loud.

"What is it?"
 I hold up our hand. "This! I think
 this is what got lost along the way.
 We let go each other's hand, & then came
 history. All of it."

She nods. I please her. She leads me by
 our hand somewhere, woods, White Woods?
 No Creatures follow us. All is quiet.

I want to say & say & say.
 "I do too. It's OK."
 Calm. A beat. A breath. OK.
 "Where are we going?"
 "Where I was bound already. I waited for you."

We come through the Woods to a clearing,
 a long one, & I see at the far end
 a platform, atop which sits a grand stage.
 The Princess smiles even more so at me,
 I feel as though our limbs are twining
 amongst each other in her excitement.
Ahh. Many Creatures now join us in the clearing.

We have no special place to stand or sit
 among our friends here, although I notice
 the White Bunny, the turtle who is not a
 turtle, & yes, the crazy gnattering Imp
 all nuzzle up near to us. They know me,
 sniff twice familiarly. My heart shines,
 & falls free.

“Tis a Grand Production!”
 I nod. “There is no time.”
 She laughs. Points.

A white-furred bear wearing a long
 Scotch-styled scarf is waving a long paw
 & crying: “On . . . with . . . the . . . Show!”

There is a deep-black bear who
 comes out to dance, tells a few jokes,
 juggles a few, then more, then countless
 balls, then executes an impossible tumble
 into the crowd, returning before he left.

There is the black & white bear who
 slides onto the stage, dancing high
 & low, tapping his paws artfully to music
 I wonder must be the Traveling Troubadour’s,
 & brings out the black bear & others to
 leap & fall to the audience’s delight.

Our friend the White Bunny on stage
 performs many dazzling long-eared
 hops, impossibly high & fast!

There is a comical dalmatian & his
 daffy quips. There is a purple-furred
 dancing Creature, long ribbons in
 dizzying flourish. There is the tumbling
 brown monkey who jumps seeming miles
 high. Many, many others come & go.

I forget who I am & am smiling
 the Princess's smile, laughing
 her laugh, feeling her long deep
 warmth with these friends.
 This is who I am when the world
 isn't in peril, or when we let each
 other be.

There is the handsome bumblebee gliding
 over us, & atop his furred back is
 a small melancholy-faced pup, & they
 fly together not like steed & rider but
 like their paws too are one, like
 there is no other way to be, stars
 above, earth below, *we too are one,*
we too are one.

I wake. Cry out. "*Shhh.*" Look around.
Oh. Creatures cavern. They are
 clustered all around us, still dozing.

She smiles down at me, I panic, but
 feel our hand still warmly one.
 Relax a moment. Let her arms around
 me possess me all. So close. Release. *So close.*

"Yes. And no." We recede a little. Just a little.
 "There's more. There's else."
 "Not every Creature lives safely here."
 "Nor most of the world. Shaped like men,
 Creatures. Trees. Everything."
 "It's why I called you. Why you brought
 my blue bag."
 I nod. I'm ready.

lx. Deeper Creature Time: Leaving Off

*"Nothing remains still."
—Heraclitus*

Sitting side by side, we unclasp the blue bag
& open its cover. A soft floral scarf
covers its contents.

She removes a dearly known item to me.
The braided Threads, hands them to me,
these are still powerful for our task.
I nod.

Then she takes out two small red balls,
blue striped. Three more, orange these.
She nods this time. I put them aside
me with the Braided Thread.

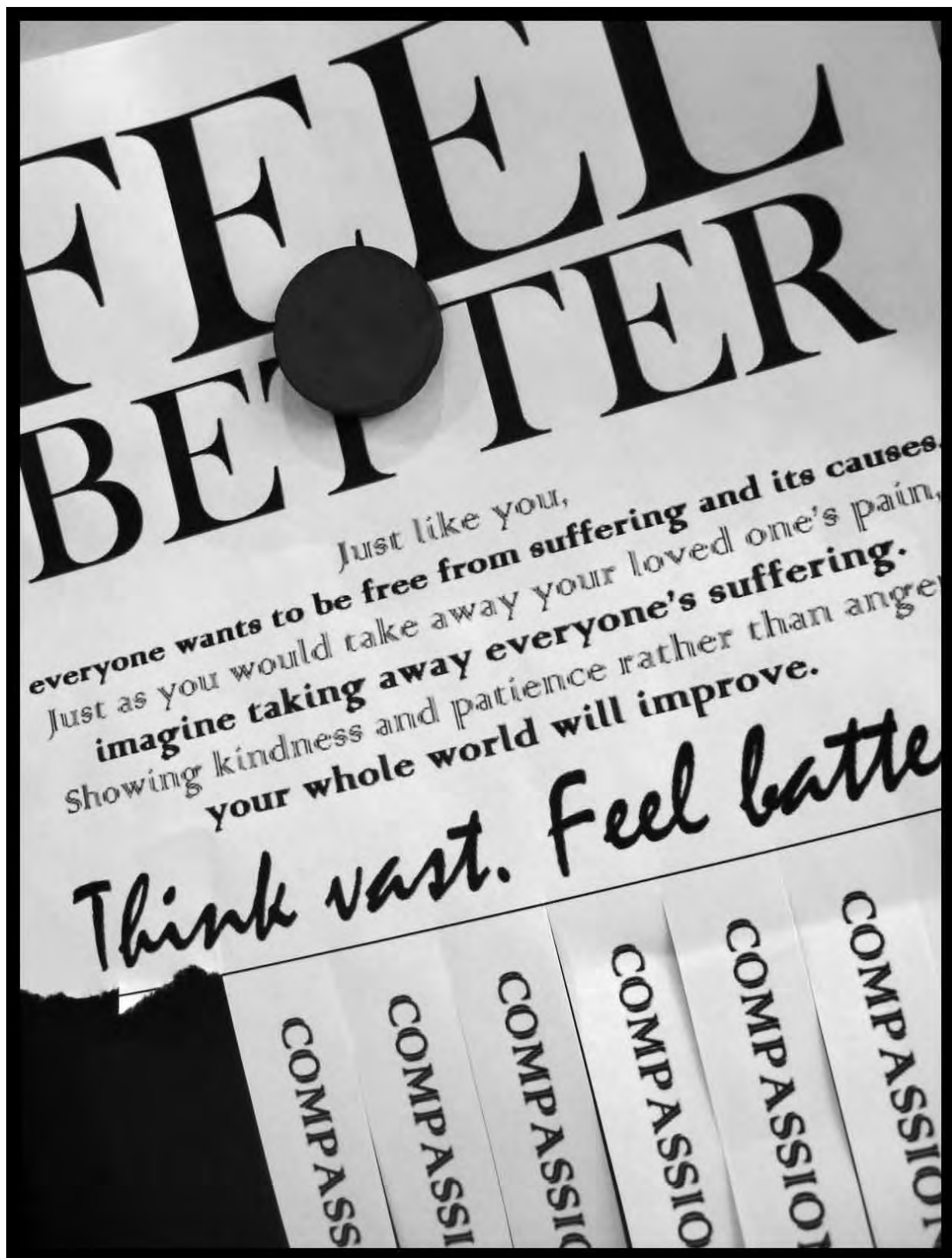
The Creatures stir & wake around us,
sniff twice, know change & gather,
gather close.

We each touch the Creature near to hand,
the Princess her White Tiger, me his kind-eyed
bullfrog companion.

I feel each Creature touching to each,
one to many to all, paws, nuzzles,
we too are one, we too are one.

"You're doing this to teach me.
You know this already. You always did."

The Princess smiles at me, her smile
like shine, like wash, lets me close
to her, her skin, her hair, allows me
rove across her cheek, touch her lips,
smooth to her neck, 'cross her shoulders,
upon her breasts, of them, in them,
on them, pleases me man, pleases
me soul, becomes my tongue sliding



across her body, taste you tasting me,
 let flesh meld & light, let flesh twain
 & delight to chase, release, chase,
 release, we too are one & two & one
 & two & one too.

She lays the colored balls, the Creatures
 know them as Treasures, in a pattern
 to broadcast us where we will.
 Twined one to another, the Princess
 allowing the girl's form in her for my
 pleasure, touched by every Creature
 as they doze near us, & later to dancing,
 & later to exploring cavern & Gate
 above alike, we begin to sing
 pathways into the world, touch
 & teach others how.

Remember some things. It took thick
 books of why & walls of fear against
 beasts of the world & unknown men's
 faces to shock you into following,
 obeying silence. It took centuries of
 contrived sufferings to convince you
 that *this world is to be suffered*.

It took great iron cities built
 gouging & burning from the earth
 to convince you that the world
 does not easily provide to all.
 Caterwauling leaders to scare you from
 each other too close, & let the
 suffering men & women in the streets lie,
 & *let them suffer*.

You had to tame. You had to conquer.
 You had to cage. You had to own.
 You had to celebrate dominance with feast.
 Cry & fuck. Cry & fuck some more.

There is no time. Especially in dreams.
 As we sing into the world, a low *hmmmmmm*
 you will not yet hear, tis because it began
 in your dreams, what we sang you
 as we held you close, travelled you
 by cosmos & microbe to see in all
 we too are one, we too are one.

Travel you to the Tangled Gate,
 source of your world, secret you
 can enter & learn to know. Just a drink
 from the Fountain, still lingering
 on the Gate's legend "*For those lost.*" Yes.
 You were. You'll find your way now.

In the Gate, down its many tall pathways
 of vines & stones, we'll follow you now.
 There is the Hummingbird & its tale
 of men & women remembering their first song
 & flying away, *awakening & flying away.*

Perhaps you will lead to Cloverdale,
 its dank first room, its room of mirrors,
 its desert & there a small shack.
 Will you meet the small exotic
 or the Tramp his grieving friend?
Where will you lead us next?

Maybe, freely going now, you will find
 the *hekk* stick in your hands & thus
 decide easily where this dream next,
 lead us on or let us go, part the Gate
 itself, or else a smile, & deeper in.

If Cloverdale, you might come to
 the Carnival Room if you can, learn
 to sing how &, entering its marvels,
 for you a long-limbed fiddler, for you a great
 buck barking you to knee? Will you carriage
 with us to the far end of the world,
 behold the Sleepers, join them awhile
 in their Sleeping Capsules, drink the juice
 to cross the Dreaming, or show them how
 without Capsule, without juice?

Will you choose to travel with us
 many dreams like these, learn
 what we are, Architect & Princess, &
 behold the Island outside the Gate,
 live with us its story, how we came
 to be, what we learned to know,
 what mysteries we cannot reck, wild cards
 to our equations, our songs, our histories,
 our loves?

As we sit here now with you, in this
 warm cavern, these friendly Creatures
 all around, some dozing, all partners
 in the *Hmmmmmm*, we invite you
 to wake when you will, how you will,
 make of this dream & its like whatever
 you wish, but return whenever you
 wish to as well. The Braided Thread
 we leave, ever weaving through your
 dreams. Yours to grasp or leave lie.

*[And when she at last came, & took
 your other hand, & when he came & took my other,
 something was now complete, now told of what was
 & what passes on to be. I did not let go,
 I am a man & I both hope & fear, but I willed
 my heart open wider to all, to every
 & all, we too are one, we too are one,
 together we will architect this world.
 Together we will architect this beautiful world.]*

6-14-2014



Raymond Soulard, Jr.



Notes from New England

[Commentary]

*“Please accept this ragged purse
of high notes.”*

The following continues the series originally called Notes from New England, begun in issue 24-25 (Winter 1998), then revived in issue 59 (October 2006) as Notes from the Northwest, & appearing since issue 75 (October 2010) under its original title. It is intended as a gathering-place for observations of various lengths upon the world around me. It will be culled, like much of my writing, from my notebooks, and perhaps these thoughts will be expanded upon sometimes as well.

The Tangled Gate: An Elaboration

How to begin this. I’m thinking forward & backward both. In this issue of *The Cenacle*, my *Tangled Gate* poems conclude for now. The original group of poems was 36 in number (referred to hereon as *TG36*), & they appeared in *Cenacle* | 83 | December 2012. In the six issues since, including this one, 60 more poems, titled semi-formally *The Tangled Gate: An Elaboration*, have appeared.

These poems are part of *Many Musics*, a series of poems, series of series (nine of them now) that I’ve been working on since 2006. And these poems root back to two previous series: *6 x 36 Nocturnes* (2000-2004) & *New Songs (for Cassandra)* (2005-2006). And they root back further in the poems I’ve been writing since 1981. These poems are both culmination & cumulation, & so interest me as both where my writing is & how it’s arrived here. Where it’s possibly bound as well.

And it’s more complex than that, since *Many Musics* & previous poems cross-mix with my fixtions: *Labyrinthine* (2006-present); *Why?* (2005-2006); & *Things Change?* (2000-2005). And these fixtions (these six entitled *Double Triptych*), like the poems, root deeper in older writings.

But there’s more, maybe of course. Since 1985 I’ve been writing a series called *Bags End News*, a newspaper about a fantasyland inspired in part by Victorian-era fantasy books like *The Wizard of Oz*, *Winnie-the-Pooh*, *Peter Pan*, *Alice in Wonderland*, & *The Wind in the Willows*. There are 365 issues of this project so far, & very little of them has been published in *The Cenacle* (although since 2012 I’ve been reading select issues on my radio show, “Within’s Within: Scenes from the Psychedelic Revolution”).

Then there are even more obscurely-told tales of the Creature Common, what might be called experimental pieces that cross-mix with the above but have not much often emerged in *The Cenacle*’s pages.

And the *Tangled Gate* poems root much in dreams too. I've kept a daily dream journal since 2009 & purposely work much dream material into my writing, playing with it, mixing & remixing it until something that feels full emerges. The Fountain in *TG36* began from dreams, then poems that preceded *TG36* by about a year.

Culmination. Cumulation. I've arrived at this point by working some ideas over & over, playing obsessions through, as well as letting new ideas come, mixing up this & that, seeing what happens.

When I wrote "On the Making of *The Tangled Gate*" for *Notes from New England* in *Cenacle* | 83 | December 2012, I didn't know I'd be writing more, 60 more, & that these would obsess me for eighteen months. I've played the *TG* mythos through *Labyrinthine*, through *Bags End News*, through my more experimental Creature Common works.

The Gate was not done with me, nor I it. How I resumed was to pick out some unknown man, not one of the mythos's legendary figures (Princess, King, Architect, Demon, etc.) but just a man. I mixed in lines from old poems, dreams, looking for a different way to approach the myth. Smaller, closer. Thus emerged, slowly, "the man of dreams" poems. A love story. Unresolved, a way in, a different way in. A way of indicating to me that there could be more poems if I gave the time & effort to figuring out how. *TG36* was told, but here was more yet.

To make this all work, what I had to do was presume a before & an after to the original story & even more to be told occurring during its events. Thus I call these 60 poems comprising *Many Musics*, *Ninth Series* an "Elaboration." They tell more, some prequel, some sequel, some best called side-quel. Think of the elaborate narrative tricks used in later seasons of *Lost*.

Where it began to take off for me, where I begin to get more excited, was with the poems about the Demon, the narrative that follows her to the Island, the Castle, the King. Who is she? Answering that question—that she is a twin of the Princess, but they were rift from each other as children—helped to clarify her motivations in *TG36*. She has motivations from a now-elaborated emotional narrative.

Who else then? Well of course the brother-heroes who traveled with the King to discover the Island & the Tangled Gate. Here was practically a whole mythos off the Island, leading to the Island. How they came together, what their adventures were like. The idea was to arrive them to the Island by way of explication. Now we know better, now we know *why*. So we learned about these individuals & what their quest meant to them, what they lost by it.

The two poems before the finale of this group of poems were originally a single poem I divided where it made sense. Wrote the whole of it one magic night in a funky late-night diner called Yaffa Cafe in East Village, New York City. Now elaborated more was why the Island at war with the mainland, *who against who*.

Since I was enjoying this elaborating, why not the Sleepers at the end of the world? Why not figure out what they were doing &, to make it even more interesting, why not figure out the beginning of things too? Answers lead to more questions lead to more answers & so on. No real knowing if what comes continues to be good, but I kept pushing, trying to lead from where the story had been to somewhere new, or previously unknown. Thus we learned more about the Creatures, sourcing somewhat in my experimental, unpublished writings, & we discovered that the Demon & the Architect had known each other at the end of time.

I was fascinated. I was tired. I decided to take a chance & follow through on an idea I'd failed on before. Begin with *TG36's* idea that the Princess has chosen to stay in the current world, commit to it. She reset it & now it was underway. Would she travel its centuries & places, as well as living perpetually in the Gate, in the caverns & tunnels beneath, with her beloved Creatures?

What happens when the Princess-Savior walks among us, another pretty girl in flowery dresses? This was a sequence devoted to see where it would play out, & where it led was to a character named Christina in *Labyrinthine* & another named Crisakah in *Bags End News*, & to them becoming counterparts to the *TG's* Princess. *One, none, many*. One project's mystery answered to some degree in another. Even now, the Princess's / Christina's / Crissy's sister has not yet been explored in *Bags End News*. Soon will. The mythos proceeds by its own modalities.

Now I was down to ten last poems, as each *Many Musics* series is 60 poems, & the *Ninth Series* had 50 so far. And I wanted to write these 10 poems for this issue. June 2014, no later.

So in a sense I was down to writing another, a second conclusion to *The Tangled Gate*. The distinction I drew was this: *TG36* was about the Princess discovering who she is, & her power, & deciding whether or not to commit to the world she is in. She & the Eternals can stay or move on, by her choice. We do not know what this choice was like on previous worlds, only that she had made it over & over the same way: choosing to leave.

She chooses to stay this time. What does this mean? It's like a kind of marriage, a binding commitment. She never seems to regret her choice. She's tough & she's loyal. I would choose her as a savior over one who believed he needed to engage the worst of men's ways, & then succumb to them, thus creating a perpetual racial guilt trip.

No, this Princess wishes to tend, to heal, to smile, to dance. She is very Creaturely, & that's a very good thing.

But what of the Architect? Here is where these final 10 poems began. Him living in his Tower, day & night without end, gift from the Princess. Him long lonely.

His brother, a sort of twin like the Princess & the Demon are, is Benny Big Dreams. A trickster figure who's haunted *Labyrinthine* & *Bags End News* for years, Benny here is given a story, given a brother who loves him. Who he only visits as a mutt. The Architect wishes more between them. He also misses the Princess, & understands better than any *why* the King's beloved Queen seeming abandoned him.

It is the final six poems when I begin to blow this thing out. The Architect enters *The Tangled Gate* again, looking for the Princess, knowing he will have to find the Creatures first. He has to humble himself, know the limits of his power are not enough. He submits to the Beast, to the Creatures, & finally to the Princess who, it turns out, had summoned him. Hmm.

In the last two poems, I bring the story into the heart of my experiments. I bring *The Tangled Gate* home & then send it back out. Together, the Princess & the Demon, the Architect & Benny, the Creatures around them, will travel waking & Dreamland, offering answers to many questions, & inviting all along who will join them. Free will is being given the answers & then acting, choosing if to join in healing the world. By music, by dancing, by touch where there had been none. By kindness to all. *Kindness most binds. Circulation relieves distress.*

The Tangled Gate mythos is thus shared with all, & each chooses what to think about it, if anything at all. If nothing else, the Braided Thread left in one's dreams, & its invitation, & the words *we too are one* to embrace more, less, or eschew.

Looking back. Now thinking forward. The last poem is called "Leaving Off" & by that I mean I'm looking in other directions with new poems. Not much yet by way of big ideas. Almost the opposite of ambition. Going small & trying to make it good.

That true & yet the old William Blake fragment:

*To see a World in a Grain of Sand
And a Heaven in a Wild Flower,
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand
And Eternity in an hour.*

Any artist who seeks not just truths but *psychedelic truths* cannot look big but think small too, question the micro but wonder the macro.

I've thought about spending some hours with old poems, see what they mean now. Are there hints of *The Tangled Gate* longer ago than I now think? That's possible.

But does that answer for me what next? I don't think so. I do think that I believe the following line from *Labyrinthine* will remain deeper true for me:

It's *all* Tangled Gate, in a way, all White Woods. This world an Island.

Grain of Sand.
Wild Flower.
Infinity. Eternity.
A hand. An hour.



* * * * *

Martina Newberry**Perhaps You Could Breathe for Me**

Here I make a record of the world I was born into.
I let you enter my mind to see. How far back shall we go?
First there was polio then radioactive warfare then

losses and sorrows and more warfare which was treated like a
fire sale in a sporting goods store. Then we scanned the dark skies for
spy planes. I sat in my father's lap on the roof of the high school

and counted the blue and green lines of his flannel plaid shirt.
There were tranquilizers for the mothers and whiskey for the
fathers and a Loyalty Oath going 'round to be taken

with an aperitif at 5 pm. Somewhere, I blanked out
and, when I came to, there was wild music (for God so loved the
world, He gave it Jefferson Airplane). There was free love and the

world slave trade and MacDonald's and political savvy.
There was a surplus of bright speech and the sound of bone on bone.
There were assassinations and there was the way I rocked back

and forth on my knees, knowing mourning and fear, knowing sick grief.
Enter to see moonwalks and the fires that astonished me and
the man I married who beat me and the lover I took who

did not and how that act of impure infidelity saved
my life, how a sweet tongue calmed and cured me. All of that is
history, a short record of the world I was born into.

The thread of that world stitches itself into this world where planets
rise and set and new warfare makes old history. Now, you are
entered and you know me. I hear you go, I listen for your

return, our story is inside me, finding its way through walls
and revolutions and lovers and acid rain and the truth;
through punishment, the public act of torture and submission.

Molecule by molecule, we are one, exploding body.
Our ceremonies have found a way to escalate reason:
We make love with dedication. We make peace by accident.

* * *

A Summer Evening

I tried to meditate, chant—instead,
raised up my eyes and watched ragged webs of clouds
because it was too early for stars.

Yes, there was a slight wind,
but not one on which to spread sail.
The sun monster mocked my efforts to doze.

Evenings like that, I have marked the weather by the sun
glinting off railroad tracks, by silent greenery around my balcony,
by the troubling voicelessness of my wind chimes.

Summer suppers are usually late and unimaginative
and I try to make up for them by
eating the long day in bread bits

as if digestion would grant eternal youth—eternal life.
That night, the god of street lights and the moths
that dance to die in those lights brought dark finally.

There was acre after acre of darkness,
unattached, floating,
waiting for me to tell you about it.

* * *

The Looming Whatever

The looming Whatever that
 waits for all of us—the un-
 doing, the resistance,
 the way we push against the
 sun and the violent
 forever of October
 is unsettling. Tiny bird
 beaks of regret go poke-poking
 at our hearts and we weep.
 We weep and tear at our sleeves
 and try to be reborn in
 a Jesus whose dance card is full.
 Remnants, chalky faces at
 the windows of heaven,
 bloody knuckles at the door
 to hell—all this is planned for us.
 When it's finally evening,
 we serve denial with
 Chicken Marengo and hemlock
 with a marzipan truffle.
 We lie down with Whitman and
 get up with *Good Morning*
America. No matter
 the words or the music, no
 matter the seduction of
 memory, we remain
 indefinable; we use
 up the inside minutes
 of our bodies. I write all
 this down—first one way, then the
 other—
 using words as stick figures
 to proclaim each death a new death,
 each rebirth a little less palatable than the last.

* * *

Your Lips Were Made for Song

We the dead of a coming day love your visions
—Pablo Armando Fernández, “From Man to Death”

Poets aren't crazy anymore,
I have seen this. I am waiting
for someone to pick up an old

suitcase and notebook, hop a bus
and shout poems into our faces
and spaces until we can't breathe.

The Church (America's stepchild)
whispers, “It doesn't matter,
it'll never matter,” and we

nod in agreement, fold our hands.
Death, take a walk. Go kick the asses
of the saints at Fremont, Parkside,

Anacapa, Atascadero,
and San Francisco General.
They don't mind being afraid—I do.

America, your fucking slip
is showing, you're wearing too much
makeup, your bra strap needs a

safety pin, the hem is coming
out of your skirt. You're nothing now
but an androgynous elder

in a faded hat. You are not
deep nor dirty—even your bloody,
impossible war is sterile.

What passion for it there was, is
long gone. The blame goes to God—
that Professor of All Seasons.

See, nothing sings in this country;
nothing dances, or heals, or stays.
Ashes of Roses is the color

of our new temple walls.
Now, when we fall, we will be like
any other leaf from a dead tree.

* * * * *



Charlie Beyer


Paleo Redemption

[Travel Journal]

Continued from Cenacle | 88 | April 2014

5 – Field

The days waft by in loving conversation with Lauri, John, and passing sons. The grandkid Mate turns out to be a real sweetheart, when he's not attached to a wire, and in between attacks of whining selfishness. He loves to hug and I get a full measure of it, even though I'm weird and fat, the things they put warning posters up about in his junior high. He likes us all to have family dinner together instead of each ripping a microwave burrito on the run. Of course he won't eat anything except sausages so his participation is brief before he re-attaches to the cyber world. I supply more groceries and wash dishes. I am so happy to do so. Maybe this family is hustling me for the food, but I don't care. If it's unreal, as my distrustful nature nags me to believe, then let me live in the fantasy. I need this. Everyone is so nice, it's way out of my spectrum. No one is dead or even dying. No one is ripping me for being a moral piece of crap, a failure, a dirt bag. No one is even telling me I have an advanced Marlon Brando condition.

I take showers and shave. Wear the new clothes. Sleep in a bed without dog hair. Take long walks with their little fluffy animal and feel no zoophilic lust. I'm feeling like a different person. I realize that I've been gritting my teeth for at least a year, every muscle tensed. My halting speech begins to diminish as I gain confidence. Things are relaxed compared to how it has been. I've stopped smoking and have no urge to destroy myself. I want to know what will happen tomorrow. ET never felt this good when he was dropped from space. This is certainly an alien land, but I'm assimilating somehow. It is all so strange, healing, healthy without hardly trying.

Lauri gets an email from Cathy at the museum on Friday. "Meet us on Sunday in Cannonville, Utah, and we'll pull out to camp on the day before where we'll transfer some supplies into your vehicle. I suspect that you and Charlie will ride out together so we don't have to pick up on Saturday until Sunday when we meet for Monday's arrival. See you there!" Well . . . fuck that. Whatever it says. We're packed Friday night and depart early Saturday morn to avoid having to "meet" the other museum loons and join in their confusion.

We decide to take the corgi dog, even though it only has three-inch legs. We like to think we are giving it a valuable life experience. What dog doesn't like to go camping? This thing is a tubular affair about two-feet long and a foot in diameter, similar to an oak yule log and weighing considerably more. It likes to sit on the console between the seats, as it did when it fit in a cracker box, but now that the crackers are converted to fat, the sawed-off dog obscures the auto operation. The driver can't make right turns. In theory, given enough left turns our destination will still be achieved.

John comes out to see us off and delays us 45 minutes. He goes into great detail about where the spare tire is, how to retrieve it, where the tools are . . . which he feels compelled to dig out, including the spare. It's all I can do to keep him from changing a tire as a demonstration. Then an analysis about the anti-locking breaks. A verbal schematic of the computer system controlling the anti-rollover system. Now he gets into the dashboard demonstrating where the fuses are and how to change them. Once I get him poked out of there with the shovel handle, he's on to the headlight adjustments. *For Christ's sake.* Just let us drive off with walleyed lights and a flat. If we go fast enough, we won't roll over.

Finally we waft out of this fantasy town like a soap bubble in the wind. Golf courses, club houses, and walking trails disappearing in the rear-view mirror at last. The dog's vast bulk perched between Lauri and me, as though a huge hairy pillow. As she steers, she jabs the beast with her bony elbow but it doesn't mind. Onto the western-heading freeway. I get to see the river and the landscape better as a passenger. In some hours, halfway into Utah, we turn off on a south-heading highway, into a vast landscape of towers and geologic turbulence.

"Why are you getting off the freeway?" I demand.

"This is the way," Laurie replies.

"But it's easier and takes less time to stay on the freeway until we get quite close."

"How do you know?"

"I studied the Yahoo Map. It says only three hours."

"Three hours, eh?"

"Yeah. Quick."

"But this is the way we always go. This is the way."

I have to smolder in silence for a spell. Why do the stupid thing? Why do the thing that has always been done? But then . . . why not? Why should I give a shit? This is an adventure. Who cares if we wind up somewhere else two days from now in a snowstorm? Shut your brain up, fool. *Chillax.*

For hundreds of miles we pass along a sinuous route of red rock, stacks of sandstone, and daring ridges. My sister relates to me the dinosaur discoveries that have been found along the way, the settlers who made their stand in this barren land, and the hole-in-the-wall best burger shops. We stop at a national park visitors' center, wedging our car between tourist buses. The dog is relieved among the cactus, ourselves in the public building with hundreds of Germans babbling on like it's Oktoberfest. I look for a geologic map in the gift shop but am only confronted with cartoon dinosaur drawings. In revenge, I load up on free maps and park promotionals.

On we go, over a high country where we can see a hundred miles, then back down into the canyons through micro-Mormon towns. At last we reach the jump-off town, a spired Mormon church, a dozen houses, a back road out to country unknown.

A dozen miles out of town, my sister begins to question if she's on the right road. We had passed a *Road Closed* sign and are now rattling along a dirt track in a sea of sage brush.

"Do you remember these power lines?" I ask.

"Well . . . not really. Sort of."

"How about this hill? You have to remember this hill."

"OK . . ."

"OK what? You remember it or you don't?" I'm so irritated. Why am I so irritated? I'm being an asshole but I can't seem to help it.

"Yeaah. OK . . . I remember."

"You don't remember it, do you? You're lost. How can you be lost? How can you not remember these landmarks? Sheesh."

"It's sorta familiar. Kinda . . . Left-Left-Left. That's the directions."

"Works for the dog."

"OK. Here's a left." She takes it. The road is gullied and splashed with random rock from the recent rains. "Everything looks so different."

"Do you remember that turn?"

"Welll . . ."

"Oh, great. This could take years." Coming over a small rise we see a ratty reservoir and a number of parked trucks.

"That's it. That's *it!*" She cries. "Those are the Denver museum trucks. This is the road. We're on it!"

"OK . . . good. Where are the people?"

My attitude is busted. I have to mentally slap myself and come back to being a decent brother. I have some sort of deep seated resentment towards geographic confusion. Only a psychiatric cartographer could help me, but I don't think there is any such profession.

I am relieved though. The fast approaching night out here could be pretty big and dark. And why would I care about that either? We are going to be camping in any event. Is it some unspoken rule to develop neuroses after 60? The road is really rough from washouts. At one spot she calls "Doug's descent," she stops. The SUV is on a 30-degree hill. The road is washed down to sandstone with foot-deep ruts and two-foot boulders everywhere.

"You're pretty good at this, aren't you?" She ventures.

"Hell yeah. I'd love to drive. Lemme at it." My geographic control condition is gratified. We crawl along at 5 MPH, trying not to use the electronic rollover feature of the machine. Does it even work at 5 MPH? On one downslope, we realize that the road disappears into a 12-foot cliff in front of us. I back up the hill, finding a track through the sage brush that eventually crosses the huge canyon wash in an irregular manner. A last left. Down death ridge, which is smooth sailing compared to the rest, across a mile series of bone jarring notches in the track, and we pull into an area with cook tents, scattered tents, and trucks dotting among the trees.

"We're here! We're here!" My jubilant sister cries.

"Hell, yeah. Looks grand!" I say. Actually, it doesn't look like anything. Some scrub trees and mud hills. No particular organization to the little scattered tents. No people anywhere. But an air of suspense hangs over everything. Why would these alien-colored nylon spaceships be here, 25 miles in on the most abandoned and destroyed road I might have ever been on? What is this Twilight Zone of un-reality?

It really is twilight now. We have to break out our gear and set up our own spaceships before the great wilderness dark consumes us. Others come out of tents and trees to see the new commotion. There is much hugging with my sister, shouts of joy, hearty handshakes with me. These people look rugged, desert dusted, but act intelligent. Leaky, Livingston, and Goodall types. I like it. After hugs, some quick talk of a triceratops skull sticking half out of the hill,



Courtesy of Charlie Beyer

“over there,” they gesture with a quick wave of the arm. The horns of this creature curve out of the mud like an African elephant, longing to embrace these explorers of the past. There is no bitching about the road. No complaints about where the supplies are. No stupid small talk. Only a child-like excitement to get to the next day’s sunrise so they can fling themselves off the cliffs into the land of the dinosaurs. They prance as we breathlessly talk, shifting their weight from one set of toes to another. Lauri and I have to excuse ourselves to go set up the tents, my sister’s like a small hotel, mine a crappy kiddie tent from the bargain store. But I don’t care. Only flatness and cactus-free makes a difference now. The dog barks at the unseen, now rapidly closing round its little buggy eyes.

6 – Dawn

Dawn is not really dawn. A slight lightening of the gray. The gray sky with the sun struggling on the horizon, the gray of the ancient mud all around us. I am frozen cold. I did not dig out enough blankets in the lightless last night. Now I thomp about through the brush, looking for a spot to relieve yesterday’s accumulation. Climbing a small hill, the world falls away into massive canyons a thousand feet deep, stretching fifty miles in every direction. Incredible. As I stare in awe, the sun washes the tops of castles with increasing glow. A million stratas of gray, yellow, red, green, and blue . . . carved to cliffs and pyramids, minarets and mosques . . . a Wonderland of Lewis Carroll caterpillar colors. The air is cold, biting my lungs as I gulp in gasps of amazement.

Cross-legged . . . sitting squarely on the great void’s edge, the cold but bright first rays of sun glows through my ears, tossing my shadow recklessly a thousand miles into space. Below me is 6000 feet of sediments lain down over two million years . . . 65 million years ago. Within this land roamed the grandest beasts the world has ever known: sauropods the size of ships; hadrosaurs who whooted a seven-mile song; tyrannosaurs of all sizes, hunting and tearing at the rest. Here, this land, so still, teemed with life as the equatorial jungle teems now. Here, the triumphs and sorrows of gigantic creatures played out their stories, for a millennia of eons, dwarfing our momentary existence. This is the land of GIANTS. This is the Lost World.

Below me the dog barks. The puny thing. No more than a sesame seed in the teeth of these ghosts. It barks because it has been released from the tent to pee. I should bark when I pee. A car door slams. The modern monkeys are waking, scurrying about in their trespass here. Time for me to scurry too. Trespass too.

I find my sister in good form, brushed, wearing the latest in chic outdoor wear, earthy colors, lots of string-tightening adjustments, pressed in the right places, spotlessly clean. She is in happy jabber with the residents of a truck camp 300 feet away. Bucking up my courage and struggling to suppress the “go hide and eat worms” mindset I’ve been in for a year, I stride over to the gathering. Lauri is gracious and mannered.

“Oh, this is my little brother, Charlie. He’s an inventor and a writer. He builds hovercrafts!” All true, but somehow I feel it’s all lies too. Am I those people? Who am I but a gawker into the great void? There are *Ohhhs* and *Ahaaas* about the hovercrafts. No one’s sure what to say about it. It’s sort of like saying, “I was abducted by aliens once.” Where does the conversation go from there? A polite silence hangs in the air. I don’t really want to talk about it anyway. I want to distance myself from the life that doesn’t work. I wish my sister hadn’t

brought it up.

“Got any coffee?” I ask in a cheery voice.

“Oh, hell yeah. Got a cup? We’re figuring what to do for breakfast.”

“We have eggs that I bought for camp.” Laurie suggests.

“And we can throw in these noodles and green peppers.” A skinny 20-something girl chimes in.

“Fantastic!” A big chunky and rumpled 40-something guy says.

“I’ll go get the eggs,” I offer.

Returning with the hen fruit, I help the young woman crack them open and drop the slime into a big iron frying pan balanced on a tailgate Coleman stove. At first I had taken her for a boy under three layers of work-clothes, a seaman stocking cap on, no indication of any sex at all. But now I see her bright flashing eyes under dark brows, tight tan skin, a sardonic smile with perfect white teeth behind it. She is really very pretty.

The big burly guy says, “Don’t get any shells in there, Kat.”

“What? Afraid of knocking out your last tooth?”

“I’ll knock you across the tailgate there.” He could, of course, being twice her weight and a head taller. With his stubble snarl, he is a sure similarity to a street fighter.

“I’d wish you’d try, so I could crumple those nuts of yours.”

“Anything you want to do with my nuts is fine with me.”

“Well, then. Dig out the microscope so I can find them.”

“We can use it to find your tits while we’re at it.”

“Fuck you! The closest you’ll get to these great tits is when they are looking down at your dead body.”

There is no more banter for a moment, as the two of them are chuckling so hard. My sister and I, with the few other bystanders are smiling lightly, not really sure what is going on in this foul-mouthed exchange.

“The eggs are getting hard,” she says.

“I’m getting hard,” he replies.

“You think you are, but there’s not enough to rub up against a chicken butt.”

“Try me, chicken butt.”

“In your dreams, limp dick.”

Then an accountant-looking fellow of no age or distinction chimes in.

“Grab a plate. I think it’s done.”

He has a pale skull cap on and a tan jacket. With his undistinguished face, the overall appearance is of a thumb in a big Band-aid.

“Gimmy some of that!” The big guy says as he moves quickly up behind the foul-mouthed girl. I see that her hips are very attractive, jeans stretched over perfect orbs. She swings around with the hot frying pan, nearly searing the big guy’s face.

“Damn you’re hot, little girl.”

“You’re about to wear it, turkey brain.” He takes his ration of eggs and stares silently at them, trying to develop some thought.

Presently he says: “Guess what?” A long pause follows as no one answers.

“Chicken Butt!” I say for no real reason other than the rhyme. The skinny lady’s eyes light up with a whoop of delight and she holds her hand up to high five with me. Not sure why

this hit a chord, but what the hell? I'm so secretly happy to be a part of the fun.

The story emerges about these two—the pugilist and the waif—as the conversation tries to change to dinosaur talk. It turns out that he is a teacher of science at the high school. She the bright and sassy student. The senior field trips came around the end of May a few years back, and all but one of the students elect to go on a raft trip down the Green River. The other option was much more mundane, digging in an abandoned quarry for bones of antiquity. Kat went for the bones of antiquity, the only applicant with the elder professor. There beneath the clear starry night, beside a romantic campfire, the stars in their eyes, shining with a forbidden love, planted in the million-year-old dirt. The bone was recovered, freed from its crusted lair, brought to life again in the interests of science. These two semi-secret lovers now collaborate on every field trip, with any museum or amateur association. She is now attending a university in paleontological studies, he still teaching the young and uninspired. Their findings together are rumored to be large.

7 – Canyon

A half-dozen of us trundle along the ridge in the mid-morning sun. The corgi waddles ahead of me, weaving through the cactus and twisted 500-year-old Bristlecone pines. Actually, everyone is ahead of me, as I tend to hang back a little, observing the perfect packs, the swishing rip-stop, hearing their irrelevant chatter. In truth, I no more want to be the leader. To have the fools following, the expectation that you know the way, the responsibility for the mindless tribe. Let the other ambitious ones charge out in front, their braggart beings beckoning us forward—for what ultimately? Nothing. I am content to lag behind. If they rush away, I don't care. I do not get lost. And what is lost anyway except a relief from rules? To be lost here, what an honor that would be, where all the world's a graveyard.

The canyon looms to our right, descending at 40 degrees for three-quarters of a mile. Presently, Rob, the big professor, veers off, zig-zagging through the dwarf trees and scrub brush. He is the unofficial leader of today's expedition, the purpose of it being to "prospect." The paid museum paleontologists are not scheduled to arrive until this evening, at which time they will assign who goes where and does what. Today we pretty much get to run wild.

Naturally, this suits me just fine. The less rules, the better, I generally conclude. I'm a little worried that this will be a fitness challenge fun run thing, with the 20-somethings powering off in a frantic destination-oriented display of their prowess. But to my delight, a few hundred feet down the hill, Rob begins to waver and stall in his course, as though looking for a lost watch. He bends over, picking up and discarding small fragments.

"You have to get the EYE," he says. "Without the EYE you can see nothing. With some practice and persistence you will eventually get the EYE. You must be able to see. You must get the EYE." And where am I supposed to get one of these? Is this like when Ulysses stole the one eye from the three blind witch sisters? Think I can get one at Wal-Mart? I get everything else there.

But I know what the "EYE" is. I've had the damn "EYE" since I was 5, so that's 35 years longer than this pompous ass. I've "EYE"d every arrowhead, agate, crystal, coin, fossil, and mushroom in ten western states. I think I can find a few dino bones. Everyone is now scanning the ground, which is mostly multi-colored bare hillside dirt. It's a big adult Easter egg hunt. Rob is down on his knees now, fiddling in a patch of fragmented bone. The others crowd



Courtesy of Charlie Beyer

around to see what he's doing. Suddenly he pulls up a tooth, inspecting it at arm's length in front of him, like holding a amulet against the sun in a ritual. Goddamn, that's cool. A dino tooth 67 million years old. Kick ass!

The big guy, squat in the dirt now like a bear, sets to unloading his pack. Now a scientific process is to be undertaken, and we are to watch and learn. He GPS's the location after giving us confusing instructions of its operation. Then puts the tooth back how he found it and photos it too much. Producing a tiny form and a runt pencil, a lot of time is spent filling out irrelevant details. Crap! I got the shovel. Let's fling shit and dig out a necklace of teeth. Pop in the pocket and run.

I ask the 20-something chick a question I already know the answer to, but am all about the engagement.

"So what exactly is the EYE? How can you tell a bone from the rest of the rocks?" She inflates pretty well. The sun is warm and I'm seeing a tight tee shirt and jeans.

"Yes, you have to have the EYE." *I got two of 'em painted on you, honey. How many do you want?*

"It is partly about the color. A bone will generally have a lighter color, and newly unearthed bone will be shiny." *Show me some shine.*

"The most distinctive thing is that bone has no straight lines. It's curvy, sexy looking." Her eyes twinkle at me. Her hips shift in a subtle way. Fuck all curvy your sweet-ass-gimmiegimmieygoddamn it! They say youth is wasted on the young, but she seems to be getting her money's worth. Why can't I just bury forty years here in the ground and proceed with what my brain is going on about. The earth would care less, another forty to the fossil pile, a fly speck to it, but a transformation for me.

This is getting pretty boring and I need to get away from her and my brain. Quietly I drift off backwards as if pond froth caught in a gentle breeze. I got the "EYE" now like a mutha-fucker. The bug eye. I see dino bone everywhere. Little disconnected fragments, some fragments you can fit back together. The directive here is to leave it where you found it. If it's some kind of Mac Daddy Dino, then GPS it, go through all the recording bullshit. But the crap is everywhere, and none is connected to a buried dino in the hill. At each new assemblage of fragments, you think . . . *this is it!* This is just the middle finger bone flipping you off and if you can follow that up the wrist, to the arm bone, then "the arm bone what connected to the shoulder bone, what connected to the neck bone, what connected to the haid bone . . ." I'm humming the old sharecropper's tune excessively as I wander the slope. It is so incredibly pleasant, artistically twisted pines, spiny bushes, the air still, the day long.

I find an eight-inch diameter fossil log imbedded in the rock, but unless there's eggs fossilized in the knothole, nobody gives a damn. Bones are every dozen feet. I do pocket some of the nicer fragments. Who's gonna frisk me? Maybe I could confess and *she* would pat me down while she swore and talked nasty. An old man's dreams.

"Seeing" again, there is a knuckle bone the size of my fist. It's curved and sexy for damn sure. Nothing else anywhere nearby. So weird. Being too big to pocket, I set the beauty up on a rock. GPS the spot, but don't bother with the paperwork. There is a commotion up the hill behind me. My sister calls for me to join them. Scrambling up the hill, I find the people crowded around Kat, who is wedged into a 3-foot-deep ravine. The latest rain storm has cut deeply and exposed a full fossilized turtle, about two feet across on the shell back. The designs and patterns this creature displayed in life are still visible in its bone carapace.

Kat must now carefully excavate around it, plaster it to hold it together, and slowly extract it. She is totally excited, wiggling and thrashing in the narrow decline. It's a big job with little working space. Rob offers to climb in there with her, but gets the tiger cornered in the cage treatment. Snarls and claws. We leave her to her task and wander off in all directions, prospecting again.

From the calls and voices through the trees, I gather that everyone is migrating down the slope. With a last twenty-foot drop off, we land in a winding wash. The dog tumbles down next to us in a sprawl. Kat has secured her turtle up the hill and will retrieve it later. Together we hike as though late for an appointment down the draw. The occasional dino bone is in the stream bed underfoot. Soon we connect to a larger stream bed, also dry, but evidenced of a torrent a few weeks ago. Flotsam is balanced in the bushes at head height. Rob keeps up a hurried pace, the reason why being unclear.

The land is weird. Formations of rock sit balanced on towers from the size of bowling pins to metro buses. Great slabs of stone slither down mud hills. Blobs of brown sandstone bubble up like boils in flat areas. Great layers of gypsum come out of the gray mud in places, as though thick sheets of glass had been buried there. Some places are an acre of prickly pear cactus not much higher than the ankle. Sprouted green bear ears, dense with spines. The dog tractors around the needles, no matter how thick, never punctured, never stopping. Most curious of all are quartzite cobbles, perfectly rounded, striped with the lines of a half a billion year old beach, scattered about the landscape like lost marbles. These stones—travelers not from this landscape—must have come from hundreds of miles away.

Over little low mud ridges adorned with colored cobbles, through knee-high boulder fields of jagged sandstone, in the dry wash, back out again, across a brilliant white flats we continue. Abruptly Rob stops, inspecting a red blob of rock the size of a watermelon.

"A track," he exclaims.

"A rock," his nemesis retorts in the same tone.

"This is a sauropod track. See. See the toes?"

"Toes? Toes, my ass. I don't see any toes," she says.

"I don't see your ass either."

"And you ain't never gonna, ya pervert dreamer."

"Yeah . . . sure . . ." Rob is not even paying attention to the banter, so engrossed in his *discovery*. "Look! Here's another one. You can clearly see the shape of the round foot here. And the toes. One, two, three toes. Wow!" He is very excited, although they still look like blobs of rock to us.

"So where's the rest of the dino, Mr. Paleogeologist?" Kat asks.

"Don't you get it? These are the prints of the sauropod that filled with this sand and fossilized."

"These are track casts then, you are saying," I interject.

"Yes. Yes. Casts. A twenty-ton brontosaurus walked right through here." His hand on the red rock, his face lifted and gazing blankly into the air, it is as though he was watching the massive creature at that moment. After a few heavy sighs, Rob returns to the 21st century, shakes his head a little and we move on.

Over a small rise we come to a flat area boarded by a twenty-foot wall of gray mudstone.

On top of the mud is a two-foot thick layer of the red sandstone and it is as flat as a table up there.

“Here’s another one!” Rob bellows. At our feet are dozens of blobs of rock that have eroded down from just above. Rob rolls the 50-pound stone over to us. Yes. This one does look like a track. Like a coffee can with three distinctive blobs protruding from the bottom.

“I’ll be god-damned. It sure as hell does look like a foot,” I say. I dig out my camera and snap at various angles.

“Here’s another! And *another!*” Rob shouts. He’s really going ape shit now. It *is* pretty fucking cool, I have to admit.

“Let’s check it up there,” I say pointing to the red rock cap above us. “Probably a whole squad of em heading to the 7-11 for sauropod cigarettes.”

“Yeah! Yeah!” answers the high school professor. Little flecks of spit flit into the air as he snaps his bull head toward me. We scramble up the slope where he finds four more tracks. On top of the sandstone, Rob is almost in an apoplexy of joy.

“We should be able to see which way they went. Maybe they are hiding around here,” I say. Rob ignores me. He is scanning the stone with a fury. There are no tracks in evidence. Some slight depressions. That is all.

“These must be the tracks. Highly eroded,” he conjectures.

“Here’s a human footprint next to a dino depression,” I say. “I guess this is proof of the creation theory after all. You may be out of a job.”

“*Huh!* What have you got there?” The pugilist is wild-eyed, beginning to lunge toward me with heavy steps.

“Just kidding, Rob. Just kidding. I got nothing.” He turns abruptly. Annoyed that he wasted a nano second on such stupidity. A contemptuous look towards me, the newbie idiot. I guess I either need to not taunt the serious scientists or make better jokes. Probably both. He is fumbling with his notebook and GPS unit. If I had a cigarette, I’d smoke it like a sauropod.

Eventually our troupe moves on, deeper into the valley’s reaches. Some want to stop for lunch but big Rob insists that we continue on to the “lunch spot.” Cliffs and towers of mud and sandstone surround us. We pass a spot covered in irregular black rock that is reported to be dinosaur crap. A close inspection of it reveals masses of chopped plants, so it really must be what they say it is. This is fascinating. I am told that a pile the size of a Volkswagen bug has been discovered previously in the hill nearby and now resides in the museum. No one can figure if this was just one dinosaur with a bad Ex-Lax habit or a site where many used the potty, such as many modern grazing animals do. A Chinese lady is making her career on this shit.

The next wonders are tiny fragments of eggshells. Whose eggs? The biggest piece is a quarter the size of a baby toenail, but they are textured oddly. Black with age. More random bones spilling out of the hill walls everywhere, largely ignored by these seekers of new finds. The “lunch spot” is a small island in a large flat with a lone shrub tree.

If the flat was water, it would be a paleontologist cartoon setup for the desert island castaways, the caption being: “Don’t worry. In another 65 million years, plate tectonics will drift us to Vegas.” There is not enough shade from the puny tree for all of us, but I don’t care if I sit in the sun. I am just happy to be one of the castaways.

Rob and Kat pleasantly bicker. Hogging most of the shade.

“What’s this crap? A P&J sandwich? Where’s the meat?”

“Between your ears. You are the meathead,” she says.
 “Why do I have to eat this? How could you do this to me?”
 “Because you’re too lazy to make your own lunch.”
 “I need meat, I tell ya.” His eye glittering at her.
 “It’s bad for your cholesterol, Dad,” She counters.
 “Give me your sandwich.” He rudely grabs at it. She parries with a lunch box swing, hitting his hand.
 “Oh, great! Now you’re trying to break my other finger,” he whines.
 “I didn’t break your finger. You broke your finger.”
 “You dropped a rock on it.”
 “You told me to let it go.”
 “But you didn’t have to mash my finger.”
 “You deserved it and you know it.”
 “What are you eating there anyway?”
 “Tofu. You hate it.”
 “Yes. That’s disgusting.” And so on they go. Loving every jab and insult. Re-living past clumsy closeness.

Lauri decides we need to look at a bone specimen down the valley, high in the hill. The other four want to sniff the far side of the valley, so we split up with vague comments about re-connecting. This place is so beautiful, carpets of the rounded quartzite, small flats of bleached mud, pinnacles all around of improbable stacking. In a half a mile or so, she pauses at the outlet of a steep gulch.

“I think this is it?” There is question in her voice.
 “You do? It looks like all the rest.”
 “That mud cliff up there looks familiar,” she says without conviction. Mud cliffs are everywhere.
 “Ok then. Let’s do it.”

* * * * *

Bashō

Autumn moonlight
a worm digs silently
into a chestnut

* * *

A bee
staggers out
of the peony

* * *

Midfield
attached to nothing
the skylark singing

* * *

A cicada shell
it sang itself
utterly away

* * *

The beginning of art—
a rice-planting song
in the backcountry

* * *

Winter solitude—
in a world of one color
the sound of wind

* * *

The bush warbler
in a grove of bamboo sprouts
sings of growing old

* * *

If my voice was good,
I'd sing a song of cherry
blossoms falling

* * *

Drinking sake
brings on insomnia—
it snowed all night

* * *

The cry of the dove
penetrates even the stone
door of this dark cave

* * *

For today only,
we'll grow old together in
the first winter rain

* * *

First snow
falling
on the half-finished bridge

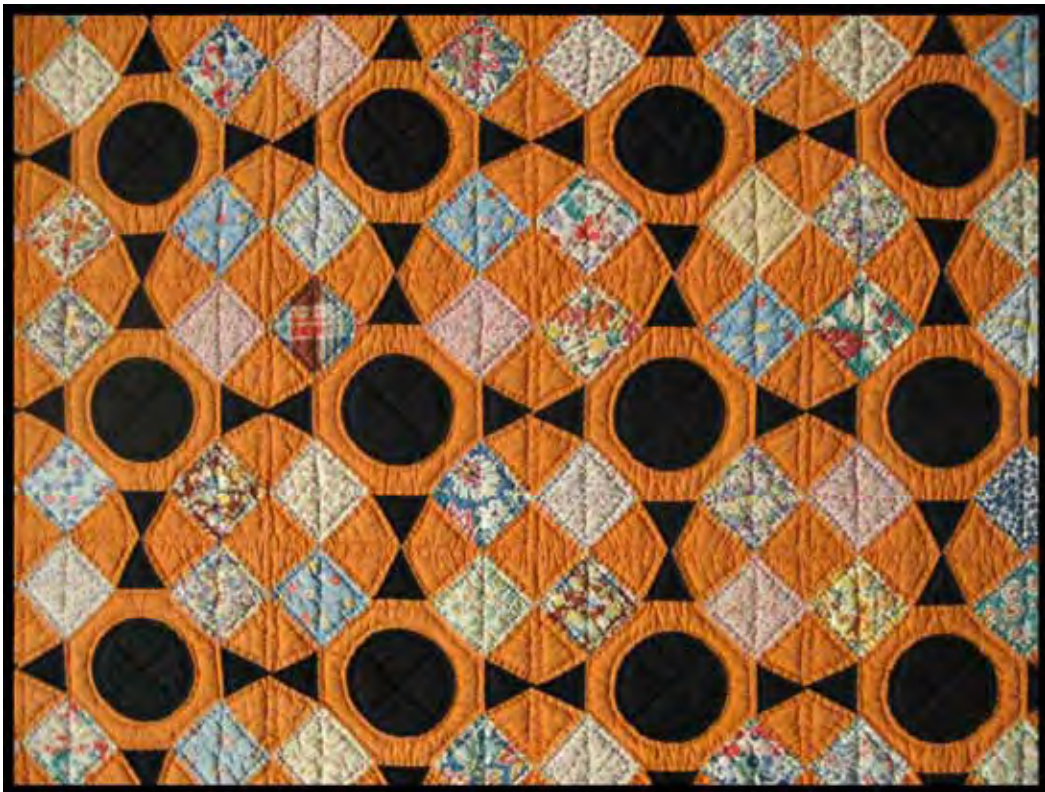
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Quilts and Color

Museum of Fine Arts
Boston, Massachusetts
April 6, 2014 - July 27, 2014









Judih Haggai

birds and i
fly the distant fields
then discuss

* * *

a lie
a half-smile of deceit
forgive or explore?

* * *

glad to be alive
dreams leave me exhausted
one bird lends a hand

* * *

look and find
search conscience and suffer
or let go and breathe

* * *

collapse of yang
lost in a sea of mushrooms
feeble cry for help

* * *

into the future
mind drags cobwebs
body follows trail

* * *

neighbour's garden
waterfalls over pebbles
his voice is silent

* * *

symbols of meaning
clog up my pathway
time to wake up

* * *

a germ of conscience
slowly matures
and seeks companions

* * *

one black cat
infiltrates my life
bed and breakfast

* * *

chunk of flesh
from me to horsefly
alms to the poor

* * *

towards the light
wherever it leads
curious to see

* * * * *

Tom Sheehan



Caitlin, Tollgate Collector

[New Fiction]

The sun, angling into her eyes, had come up “like thunder out of China ‘crost the bay,” and even as Caitlin Bordeaux made music of the poet’s words, she couldn’t remember his name. Nothing was right in the scene though the day had begun in promise. Nick had just gone through mere minutes earlier, the load piled high on his flatbed rig. Most of the night the truck had been parked in front of her house, the neighbors probably talking again. She didn’t care, his mouth still alive on her.

Now here’s this turkey of a traveler playing music so loud it was damned oppressive. A ‘98 Nissan Maxima, gray, four-door; she had identified every car for a whole year, and hadn’t dropped a bill or a coin in months. Why would some idiot heathen play music as if he were leading a marching band, and obnoxious music to begin with? Something in the day was going to bother her, she just knew it. Why wasn’t the loud music ever something she loved, some Puccini, something with body to it? Or a decent dream song? In the back seat of the Maxima she saw the piled-up blanket moving with slight jerks, some living thing in motion. A thousand and one sights she’d seen in her two years here catching coin and currency; people in the back seat swapping favors, or so still they looked dead, once a huge snake sunning at a rear window. Surprises were never too far away. Obviously this was another one. She wouldn’t even hazard a guess.

The monoxide fumes swirled through the door and her own cubicle exhaust system sucked them up, but the stream passed around her, touched her. Every time out it made her think of Bill Gennaro’s garage back home in Indiana. They’d lived upstairs for ten years and oil and gas fumes and the smell of car rot she thought were environmental, were part of the universe.

It came again with the Maxima, odd for a car only four years old. Would the fumes cling at her skin, age her quicker than another job? In one glance she looked at the mirror propped up in place on each shift she came to work. Some of the collectors kidded her about it. Only Chauncy in the next booth had refrained from ragging on her. Every day thousands of people handed her money and looked at her, eyes at times so leveled and so degrading she’d want to smack them. Thirty-four she was and holding on for the ride. So far there was but the hint of wrinkles, and a thin line curving down beside her nose and getting lost at the corner of her mouth. The teeth of her smile were attractive, she believed, which made her smile reassuringly, an inner dictate making visible its demands.

Blue eyes, hiding a bit of pain as always, might give her away if she let them. Nick said she was goddamn beautiful, but how could she count on that? Didn’t he smell of oil and gasoline and the fumes that 18-wheelers seemed to lug in their wakes forever, invisible tails of huge road comets?

It was a ten-dollar bill the man in the ‘98 Maxima had handed her, a good looking guy,

maybe fifty, gray hair, but eyes out of a far grandstand, deep, labored, bedeviled. She hunted for more of the poet's words, but the music could have killed her. A diamond on one of driver's fingers, she thought, could pay off the mortgage. She made a face at the music, but he didn't make a move to turn it down. Then her heart leaped! Out of the corner of her eye she saw the high-crowned blanket move in the back seat. It fell partly away from what it was draped on and she saw a little blonde girl poking a straw through the bars of a small cage even as she handed the man his change.

Her heart leaped into her throat. She thought of her daughter Mercy still in bed at home and her own mother sleeping in the next room.

The man looked into her eyes even as he stepped on the gas pedal. The Maxima jumped out northward on the turnpike. The panic was on her, in the bloodstream, her heart jamming her throat. Nick was up the road ahead of the Maxima, the next exit about twelve miles away. Nick, with the lovely mouth, with the great hands, was the only hope. The only hope! Caitlin Bordeaux made her move. Screaming for Chauncy Dewitt in the next booth, she scared hell out of a man and woman in a '95 Chevy. She grabbed her cell phone and dialed Nick's number, praying he had his phone on. She held up one finger as Chauncy ran to her booth and she stepped outside. Cars plugged her lane. The fumes were rampant. She held her hand up for Chauncy to listen.

Nick answered.

"Listen, Nick. Life or death. If you want to see me again, listen." The demand was in her voice, in its ascension, that breathless lift. She tried to shake the scream out of it. "Behind you, maybe three or four minutes, a gray '98 Maxima, man at the wheel. He's got a little girl in a cage under a blanket in his back seat and he's playing music loud enough to drown out her cries." He started to say something but she wouldn't let him and Chauncy Dewitt ran to get his own cell phone. Traffic had slowed. Now three gates were stopped tight. "If he gets to the next exit that little girl could be lost forever." She had to tell a lie. "I called home. There's no answer. It could be Mercy. I don't know." She hoped it was a lie. Oh, God in heaven wouldn't punish her for such a little lie.

Nick's voice boomed back. "What the hell can I do, Caity? I can't stop him. What did you call me for? What the hell can I do?" Nick could choke every time he thought of her. His breath could hide in his gut waiting to blow him up, he thought her so lovely, how her hips would mound, how her mound would hip him. Driving the long days on the road he would play the little games of memory, the recall of taste and wonder, the softest touch coming in a moment of such clarity he could spend hours thinking about it, recreating it, the road spinning out ahead of him apparently in absolute control. Now it was done for sure. The screaming in his ear, making new demands.

"Goddammit, Nick, stop the truck. Block traffic. Don't be afraid of a goddamn ticket." Her voice was ascending. "The Staties aren't going to bite you. Stop the damn traffic! Make a roadblock! It's a little girl, Nick. I swear to god you'll never see me again if he gets away with her. It's only twelve miles to Exit Five."

Chauncy was on his phone and waving at her, pointing back down the road and up the road and then overhead. It was as if he were on television and explaining to an audience what was going on. He rushed over to her booth. "Caity, you sure?" His hand was over the phone and his eyes were wide but he was a new grandfather and a former Marine, a rock-solid man. Balding and rugged and smiling a lot, he never ribbed her about looks, never

asked embarrassing questions. He'd come out of the fire-flung jungles of Viet Nam where he'd made life and death decisions by the hundreds, sometimes every day. Kicking in was the old adrenaline on the loose, the "you are it" pin tagged on his chest. The M-16 seemed to be frozen in his hands again. The plea in her eyes came universal, the mother's plea, and the knowledge of thousands of years of motherhood. He bet on her. "I saw him and the kid, Lieutenant. Is that you, Bubba? Yes, I saw him myself. '98 Maxima, gray four-door, music playing loud as hell like he was drowning out her cries. Son of a bitch, I get him I'll kill that bastard!"

It had been perhaps seven minutes since Nick had left, Caitlin thought. Twelve miles to the next exit. If he did 70-80 the Maxima could be there in minutes, the girl gone forever. It was up to Nick. She wondered what kind of a father he'd make. Now he had the chance to show her.

In the Diamond-T, the flatbed behind him piled with new but empty pallets, Nick Pridon saw the sign saying Exit Five was a half-mile away. Never had he met anybody like Caity in his twelve years on the road. Whenever he got to her place it was like coming home. That had to be important. If he went by the exit, let the guy and the kid get away from him, she'd know somehow. That truth snapped through him like a whip. The shift knob fit into his hand firm as her breast. The marvel of Caitlin Bordeaux came over him once more. His feet began to dance on the pedals, the gears taking on a new hum, the light load shifting slightly and Nick Pridon pointed into the floor to a trucker he was about to pass. He could have been saying anything but was obviously in need of some help. The brake pedal banged against his foot, the load shifted with a slight creaking, easily, like a snake in the grass, and the Diamond-T began a hitching slow-down on the turnpike.

The newly cut grass at the exit popped up just ahead on his right and the overpass beyond it where Exit Five raced off to the west. Four American flags snapped in the morning air above the overpass chain link fence. The Kenworth rig beside him, one that Nick had seen before with a State of Maine map on the driver's door, ground slowly to a halt with him. Behind them came the screech of brakes, harsh screams coming off the pavement. But there were no impact sounds. Traffic stopped. Nick stepped down from his cab and looked behind him, back down the road toward the toll plaza almost twelve miles behind him. The traffic all along the pike was coming to a standstill. On a crown of the road, over a quick rise, vehicles coming to a crawl looked like dominoes edging into line.

A man leaped out of his car immediately behind Nick's rig. "It's on the radio. Some son of a bitch has a kid in a cage in his car. Between here and the last toll plaza unless he got past us and took this exit. The guy on the radio says the police are sending out a helicopter and they're coming down here from Exit Five. Says the guy is playing music loud enough to kill you."

The man looked back over his shoulder. Nick looked. The driver of the immense Kenworth looked. They could hear the music like a hundred boom boxes at work, and down the median strip, speeding on the narrow grass plot, careening, swerving in and out of sudden swales and dips, came the gray Maxima, the heavy music leaping out front of it like the blast of trumpets. Nick looked at his rig. He'd never get it across the median in time. Morning traffic was heavy going in the opposite direction. The man who talked about the radio announcement looked at him. All around them people were out of their cars, some yelling, some saying "kidnap, loud music," some complaining and swearing. The man behind Nick leaped into his car and pulled it broadside across the median just as the Maxima came up out of another deep swale and stalled on a crest of ground.

The man in the gray Maxima leaped out of his car and heard sirens in the distance, their wail as harsh and cutting as screams. When he tried to jump back into the car, half a dozen men pinned him against the side door. Nick pulled open the back door, flipped the blanket off the cage, unlocked the top and picked up the little girl. She screamed in his ears and struggled and he showed her to people gathered around them. A grandmotherly woman reached for the child and held her in her arms. The woman kept shaking her head and clutching the little girl against her bosom.

Chauncy Dewitt, standing in front of ten miles of backed up traffic at the toll plaza, danced across the pavement, waving his arms at Caitlin. He had the phone at his ear. People were all over the road, the radio still blasting out the news alert. Chauncy had called the local radio station. A gutsy early-morning disk jockey and news broadcaster had jumped the news with an instant headline for the morning travelers. "Here's in-process news breaking for travelers northbound between the Parkman Toll Plaza and Exit Five. A kidnapping is in process right now. A man in a '98 gray Maxima, playing loud music, has a small girl in a cage in the back seat of his car. Don't let him get off the road at Exit Five. It could be your kid he has." He had kept saying the same thing. The police had been called, the wheels had turned.

Caitlin Bordeaux, late that night, heard the engine of the Diamond-T grind to a halt, air escape the connection line, a door slam with a solid thunk, and Nick Pridon's footsteps on the walkway moving toward her. Mercy sat sleeping in her lap as she had for two hours, the night-light on, shadows bouncing around them, a few neighbors' lights throwing off a warm glow.

* * * * *



Joe Ciccone

Denial

*The buildings not here are mine.
It is my rollercoaster
gone out to sea.*

*When we reach the top of the stairs
it will be summer.*







End the Ban on Psychoactive Drug Research

[Editorial]

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Discovery of new psychiatric medication, whether for the treatment of depression, autism, or schizophrenia, is at a virtual standstill. As just one example, the antidepressants on the market today are no more effective at reversing the mood disorder than those that first became available in the 1950s.

New thinking is desperately needed to aid the estimated 14 million American adults who suffer from severe mental illness. Innovation would likely accelerate if pharmacologists did not have to confront an antiquated legal framework that, in effect, declares off-limits a set of familiar compounds that could potentially serve as the chemical basis for entire new classes of drugs.

LSD, MDMA (Ecstasy), psilocybin, and marijuana have, for decades, been designated as drugs of abuse. But they had their origins in the medical pharmacopeia. Through the mid-1960s, more than 1,000 scientific publications chronicled the ways that LSD could be used as an aid to make psychotherapy more effective. Similarly, MDMA began to be used as a complement to talk therapy in the 1970s. Marijuana has logged thousands of years as a medicament for diseases and conditions ranging from malaria to rheumatism.

National laws and international conventions put a stop to all that. The Controlled Substances Act of 1970 declared that these drugs have “no currently accepted medical use” and classified them in the most stringently regulated category of controlled substances: Schedule I. The resulting restrictions create a de facto ban on their use in both laboratories and clinical trials, setting up a catch-22: these drugs are banned because they have no accepted medical use, but researchers cannot explore their therapeutic potential because they are banned. Three United Nations treaties extend similar restrictions to much of the rest of the world.

The decades-long research hiatus has taken its toll. Psychologists would like to know whether MDMA can help with intractable post-traumatic stress disorder, whether LSD or psilocybin can provide relief for cluster headaches or obsessive-compulsive disorder, and whether the particular docking receptors on brain cells that many psychedelics latch onto are critical sites for regulating conscious states that go awry in schizophrenia and depression.

In many states, doctors can now recommend medical marijuana, but researchers cannot study its effects. The uneasy status quo leaves unanswered the question of whether the drug might help treat attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder, nausea, sleep apnea, multiple sclerosis, and a host of other conditions.

A few privately funded studies of these compounds have yielded tantalizing hints that

some of these ideas merit consideration. Yet doing this research through standard channels, as psychopharmacologist David J. Nutt of Imperial College London and his co-authors noted in a recent article in *Nature Reviews Neuroscience* [14, 577–585 (2013)], requires traversing a daunting bureaucratic labyrinth that can dissuade even the most committed investigator. (*Scientific American* is part of Nature Publishing Group.) It can take years to receive approval for a clinical trial from both regulators and hospital ethics committees, even while tallying thousands of dollars in licensing fees and tens of thousands to obtain drugs that are, of course, unavailable from a chemical supply catalogue.

The endless obstructions have resulted in an almost complete halt in research on Schedule I drugs. [This is a shame](#). The U.S. government should move these drugs to the less strict Schedule II classification. Such a move would not lead to decriminalization of these potentially dangerous drugs—Schedule II also includes cocaine, opium and methamphetamine, after all—but it would make it much easier for clinical researchers to study their effects.

If some of the obstacles to research can be overcome, it may be possible to finally detach research on psychoactive chemicals from the hyperbolic rhetoric that is a legacy of the war on drugs. Only then will it be possible to judge whether LSD, MDMA, marijuana, and other highly regulated compounds—subjected to the gauntlet of clinical testing for safety and efficacy—can actually yield effective new treatments for devastating psychiatric illnesses.

* * * * *



Joe Coleman



Eskimo Jesus

with tattoos
 paddled his rowboat along the Thames
 into my reverie.
 His oars, long-handled mirrors,
 reflected the divinity in his face.
 Stereophonic,
 I watched from both shores
 —hoping he would begin to sing.
 Many crowds had gathered.
 They all looked like ideas.
 They spoke the mystic tongue
 only deaf people comprehend
 —a language I imagined I once knew.
 The idea-crowds had not gathered to watch Eskimo Jesus
 with tattoos . . . they had come to fill reverie with possibility.
 If they had been believers they might have prayed,
 “Sing, Eskimo Jesus with tattoos . . .
 sing a song about morning and belonging!”
 But they were not believers.
 Eskimo Jesus with tattoos kept paddling.
 Eskimo Jesus with tattoos kept paddling
 as the Thames curved into and out of itself
 becoming an enormous, watery,
 Arabic numeral

8.

Eskimo Jesus with tattoos pulled in his oars
 and let the currents take him
 around and around
 and in
 and out.
 Eventually the crowds drifted away,
 ’til there were no ideas.
 I too went home to be about my father’s business.
 However, for the remainder of the day-dream, I was singing,
 “It’s nice to wake beside you,
 to greet today together,
 to place my arms about you,
 my sky embracing sunlight,” my father harmonizing.

* * *

Daedalus In Grief

Icarus, my son . . . sprung from these loins but in captivity,
I gave you life
then fashioned wings;
feathers fixed with wax
strapped along our arms across our backs
to fly together so we might live free
. . . free of that tower and the King of Crete
for whom I built the maze.

Wings . . .
to hoist us upwards as we gazed at Oceanus
underneath our sandaled feet.

Wings.

I fabricated power by which we would at last
escape King Minos' lofty tower.

I warned you Icarus, my child,
"Be mindful of sea-spray:
it adds to what wings weigh.
Fly not too low!"

You merely smiled.

I cautioned you, "Be wary of the heat . . ."
 and not to fly too high,
 too high
 where Apollo burns white seagull and black crow
 where sunlight will melt wax,
 "Your wings will break apart."

Ah, Icarus . . . you could not wait to start . . .
 the sky was in your eyes . . .
 the sky Pegasus flies.
 The sky filled up your heart.

Icarus, my boy,
 you were the first to quit the parapet
 as I, your father, filled with pride,
 watched my son rise
 and swoop and glide in temporary joy.

Past Lebynthos . . . the isle of Delos . . . confident,
 father and son, we soared toward Sicily.
 And when Aeolus lifted us upon his breath
 impetuous you climbed where Phaëton went
 heedless of Apollo's scorching glance.

Your youthful exultation brought you a wet death.
 It brought this grief to me.
 I watched you plummet down
 in a descending dance.



Icarus, my son, my son . . . I saw you fall.

I heard your desperate call.

Oh, Icarus . . .

I saw you drown.

Briny waves had feathers floating on their crests;
plumage for the sea,
as I continued west.



Icarus, my first-born, only one . . .

Oh, Icarus . . . beloved, sorry son . . .

your father mourns on this Sicilian shore;
desolate and destitute,
for I shall hold you nevermore.

No, Icarus . . . I should have made a parachute
instead of pinion-pairs.

Or, better yet,
we could have simply walked downstairs.

* * *

Welcome Home

("whisper . . .") said the comet gently
 floating—
 drifting—
 down
 down
 down
 brightly
 like an open doorway on a cold night in December
 bringing warmth of get-togethers.

It softly nestled
 comfortable
 and with a feather's impact
 lightly
 left a scar of gratitude.

We met in fortunate collision;
 your glistening trajectory
 blazing
 golden
 tenderly
 descended in a muted hush
 brushing jewel-dust while exploding
 onto my glad consciousness.

Meeting you reminded me
 how long I've been away from home.

Enjoying you is coming back
 to celebrate a holiday.

* * * * *

Raymond Soulard, Jr.



Labyrinthine

[a new fixtion]

Part Nine

li.

He was my mutt Asterius & this was true enough. He liked when we drowsed in my armchair, when these times came. I didn't sleep as often as he did. But he always waited for me, hopeful.

Dumb brute? No. No more truly mute than the trees or the stars above. Each to his own kind's tongue & song. He couldn't speak man anymore than I could speak dog. Starlight or oak.

When I weary enough but not to sleep I'll poke the fire up, & take my seat with him. He seems longer or shorter with my wish for warmth & nearness. That's fool to say. I say it.

Sitting with him, I leave aside my magicks & my books. Our chair faces the fire at an angle, & the window shows the Great Tree I like to see. Windy, wavering. Otherwise, the Tower is quiet & still. The fire, the tree. My mutt's breathing.

I am the uncalm one in this. The fire snaps. The tree dances. The mutt naps after a time. Only I among these am unsure his role.

I try to relax, let go into my bones.
Breathe. Relax. Once. Twice.

Let history's testament fall to sand.
Let the trail of old blood diminish away.
Let the deepest love cup, not contain, & thus
learn by release.

Breathe. Relax.

Again, the dream. You are not mutt but my brother. A big man, big & broad as I am tall, lanky. Laughing, always laughing. Laughing is what you do, compel me to. You don't read books. You drink deeply, feasts & women.

We are building a wall, a construction in words, languages old like frail, warm skin; others newer, glowing with seed, humming, partway back to stars.

I pause my work, larving up syllables & stones, look up, see your laughing face, the many of you I've known. Common despair. My brother's hand on my shoulder. We continue to build this wall.

What do I know now I didn't know then? How can a dream have a depth of miles & length of years to remember by?

I nod, in my chair far, & remembering too. Mutt in my lap, brother urging me to sing.

Let the stars between dull hours be more to guide.
Let our humility sup on every beast & bug & vine & stone & new song we aren't.
Let the gorgeous rubble of dream always be the tale I yearn to tell.

I beg a little, sink a little deeper into it, grip the warm fur, *please, again.*

We begin to travel along this wall, find crevasses to hold to as more time passes than ought, years for days, centuries, we cling to this wall as it drives furiously through history.

It's an ugly wall to fast to, blotched like old blood, & its path goes jagged & uncertain. Loses faith, as old things do.

My brother won't let go me, the path, till I make him do. *Let me go.*

I close my eyes within this dream & mouth words. *Once. Twice. Breathe. Relax.*

Let the kind hours explain the world to you. Twining fingers, silver falls of leaves, meals desperate & late & fine.

There was an hour when you
could've flown,
did.

I'll keep singing this.

When I let go the wall, I wake again here. Armchair. Tree. Fire. Mutt. My shoulder aches but I don't stand yet. You're dozing in my lap.

This is as close as I can get to you. Asterius is your gift to me, promise of our bond, even now as you otherwise dwell forever in the shades & wilds of Dreamland.

lii.

Remembering:

"Cease the tide by cursing the moon? Crush the drumheads, men will pound their stones,

twice harder! Bind a woman's fire & she will lay dreaming coming stars!"

Everyone laughs. The King in good spirits. A fairly calm sea. The Island near or soon will be.

[That we are under way again is both miracle & tragedy. Would we ever have moved on if he hadn't lost his Queen? And how? How? Taken? Murdered? Poisoned?

[There was a changed sense of things one day. Like there never had been a Queen, or she long passed in years. Like something written in the sand, then crossed out, then the tide coming in.]

I pet your shaggy head. My brilliant fool. You enjoy being a dog, permission to feel everything in a moment. Piss freely.

"What his crew didn't know was that the King had contacted my brother, Benny. Traveler in dreams. *You*. I think."

[Or some kind of you. An herb he drank later that night, kind of a poison but, if survived enough, a deeper entry to Dreamland. Passage, movement.

[He bid his brothers good night & they drank on till very late. His mood gave them hope. Each had left loved ones back there, with sad faces & unanswered questions.

[You'd had no hope till the last meeting with the Travelers before setting off. Convinced you'd only find your beloved via dreamways, you'd promised them a more honored place in your future kingdom. The Island would ever welcome Travelers. For the herb.

[Now writhing in my bed, poison drunk in my belly, a cloth stuffed in my mouth so none may hear my cries. I have to survive death, alone, uncomforted, & the door will open. Strange, there are two. I choose the one to dreams this time.]

You begin to doze, lazy, know this tale, both, either. "It was you allowed him his grief, his absolute despair. She saw, finally, *understood*, that yours was to find the Island, *find the Tangled Gate*. Yours was to save the world."

I shake my head, seeing again mutt where I saw my King. I'd served no man till I knew you. None since. Knowing your grief better than you did, why it so, it carved my heart a groove close by yours.

["There will be two," you told me that night, when he let us alone, King & his Queen together a last time. "Give all to the one who comes to you first by the sea. Having done so, the second will come to you, & you may grow old finally." Kissed him last as wife.]

You tire of my Tower & want to run. I let you chase from my offices outdoors, my day & night without end, my gift from her.



I walk more stiffly than I once did, the Architect grows old too, eventually.

But each time you visit me, Benny, each time I am able to form you mutt at least, when I cannot form a man, I reckon your sacrifice anew. It was you who must keep her till the last, you who salved & broke the King's heart, finally, so he would let go, & save the world.

Eventually night again. Armchair. Fire. Mutt. Azarius. Brother. I'm not sure.

Can I come to you in Dreamland? What you don't know as you slumber in my lap, breathing in & out deeply whatever cares you have by dog or man, what you don't know is that I have the dream herb now too. My teacup. What I've brewed all night. The Architect wishes to know, wills to know, the Architect, Benny, *will know*.

"Cut!" yells the Gate-Keeper.

"Cut?" asks the Architect. Kinley?

Nods. "We've guests on the set."

"Guests?" Kinley is completely bewildered by all of this.

Two young men, one scrawny to a scary extent, the other one tubby but not grossly so.

The Gate-Keeper is kind to them, nobody knows why. Nobody has *ever* been allowed onto the **RemoteLand** set. But these two. He's ceased what seems to everyone like months of intense filming to host these two as guests.

They have questions, smiling, terrified, but here they are, on the Island, the Architect's Tower, his private offices.

The Gate-Keeper smiles. "Ask."

The thin one speaks first.

"Why would the Architect want to go to Dreamland? How are he & Benny brothers? I mean, how is Benny a traveler in dreams anyway?" Stops, more terrified of his words. The film crew is still hanging around. Kinley seems absent. As does Asterius/Benny.

The tubby one talks too. "What does the Architect wish to know? What became of the Princess?"

"What do you think?" the Gate-Keeper asks.

The two stare at each other.

"Don't be scared. Tell me. What makes sense to you?"

They are still silent.

"You live your lives around my film. Yes?"

They nod.

"You lived in the Nada Theatre until I invited you to come with me?"

Nod.

He smiles. It's a kind smile but it's dangerous. It expects.

"Then I will allow you an opinion on what happens next."

The thin one blurts, "Don't you know?"

"I'm curious. Tell me. Give a moment. Think. Then tell me."

The two are quiet. The set is completely quiet.

The tubby one says, "He loves the Princess. He always has. So he wants Benny to lead him to her."

"Or he wants to free Benny from Dreamland finally," the other one adds.

They look to him with wide eyes. It's like committing a violent crime to speak like this.

The Gate-Keeper smiles kindly. "Thank you. Your ideas are inspiring. Now you can stay on the set for the next scene. But over there, those chairs in the corner."

They nod, find their seats in the corner. Wait to see.

lii.

Between the night & day without end that you gifted me, a dusk, a dawn, where I love you still. A smile of yours I keep, even though not mine own.

What leaves last, if leaves at all, are the smaller things, cooler moments when we simply shared space. Good, & too much of it.

When you studied the Tangled Gate through my Tower office telescope, you wouldn't breathe. I'd listen from across the shadowy spectres of the room. Not a breath. You'd move the glass, inch by inch, study the maps, move some more, testing what you saw with what you encountered in Dreamland. A sudden connection, now a breath. Knowing it wouldn't be in that spot next time, *knowing it*, the Gate was like that. *Still*.

You left little scent those many years. Any man would have sniffed after you, the King's ripening daughter, but little to compare with girls who vied in your shadow, it's like you disappeared in your departures. Remained in more obscure ways.

It was your passion to know your own truths that rivens through me even now. How did I come to know what you were, when were you more than beautiful, lonely, & too intelligent Princess to me? Was it before or after I let you escape the Island?

I had chased across centuries to find a way to save the world. I wasn't going back. And it was you. I believed you were from another place, had come here, & the world of men aborn.

And then I learned my own story too. I was from that far place, from Emandia, as well. We had been landed on far ends of the story. Yours to grow with the world, find its beauties, mine to review its finale.

I love you still. We were both contrived for our tasks, however different. An attraction set along our border to assure we'd find each other, the eros between us the sparkling fuel by which we'd know the right world true, & no others, & move on bloodless otherwise.

My mutt won't come near me when my dusky walk emits like this one. *Contrivances aren't suppose to love each other.*

Why do these dusks & dawns disturb me more? What is missing?

I love you still. Now. This. I sit in my office, now, tonight, & I look over to my old telescope, perpetually pointed to the Gate, whatever the world. I see you there, now, tonight, breathless, studying, studying, & I am breathless too, *oh*, I was then too, & you are so close, I've come the world & its centuries to be in this room with you, why can't I stand up? Why can't I approach you, to explain what I know, what I don't, & present myself to your womanly gaze, for your womanly assessment, & perhaps a shy smile, & again a breath, scent of aster.

[The Gate-Keeper looks over to his young friends, nods, smiles. Ready to bow & scrape, they nod & smile in return.

[But one more to go. By request.]

liv.

We came from Emandia via deeper dreaming through the Red Bags, arrived whole & complete. You & I were one man, brother, Benjamin, Benny, compelled from one trunk to two branches, two men.

I into building, what some sneering called the architecting of the world of men. Sneering because despair, because too many failed worlds. Because only madness builds again & again, same hands, same tools, same materials, & smiling expects a novel result.

You were the *but*, Benny, the wild card in me extracted to run free.

You laughed, you raced us up hills, climbed the tallest trees, led the songs wherever we traveled & invited to a meal & a fire. Your shoulders strong, your body as broad & dense as mine lanky, divided even between your deep shouts & love of open woods & my retreat to murk & thick books.

You didn't know we were twain for purpose, by day, by night, by sun, by moon, by waking, by sleep. We receded from each other slowly, a breath, an untwined finger at a time.

Perhaps it began with your discontent with lovers. No matter how she approached, shy, brusk, a girl for the slow, gentle taking, or one to bind or be bound by leather rags, heated with claws or serrated blade, you fretted & hurried too soon from her. *Flaws, always flaws* you saw in each girl or woman. The shade of a cheek, the roundness of a breast, the want to be solely, wildly



possessed, the growl for you & a dozen other heavy-cocked men in their turn. *Flaws, always flaws.*

You dreamed more. We ceased our travels because you liked the strange pale woods we had come. "There are other beauties than the ones we have known," you'd say to me, often, like a prayer, like a tic. Kept me near for when you woke, witness to your half-mumbled visions, convinced there was an inner space shared by all, a perfect world, a *Dreamland*, did you contrive it yourself? Did it contrive you?

I would try to tell you what we were but you smiled like it didn't matter.

I asked you, "What other beauties?" & you said, "Come with me, brother, let's make them together, forever!"

And then you were gone. Gone to Dreamland, *become* Dreamland. I was alone in your pale woods. I could no more find you while asleep than awake. What did this mean? Our trunk was reft.

Eventually I mourned & let you go. I stopped looking for you in my dreams & began shaping tools there to bring back, building tools, tools to fix the flaws in the world.

A world demur enough to make men want to defend & protect her every breath & bloom. A world growling powerful enough to twist their greed, to conquer & tame, twist it crying in their minds, come for me now, *come for me*, your miracle world, its every beauty, & release. *Come again*, & release.

It was near the end of the world when you finally let us meet again. I was come in Dreamland to an old memory of our pale woods, where I lost you. I was leaving in the morning to travel back the years to the Island, Tangled Gate, find & fix the flaws. Hopeless, a woman's scent in my mind still. Tired, her embrace easy cost to let this next imperfect world go.

Came bounding up to me, barking, joyous, wet-tongued, ugly beautiful mutt & you, *you*, Benny! Barks, licks, pants, what you could give me to hold of you, so I would not ask your help mending the flaws, so if I failed I did with your love & no more.

Held you, hugged you, worried to your glory my long fingernails in your shaggy fur. Woke with your scent in my nose, my cheeks drying from your many kisses.

I left for the Island, the Gate, & willing forgot you until later, until I was retired here, day & night forever, & when we met it was in waking this time. I had nothing left to ask of you. You still came as mutt, & neither of us pressed man from you.

Perhaps where my discontent. Perhaps I want you man not mutt in my arms? Perhaps begin our travels anew, having saved this world, flaws & all, our turn together again? You sniff, you bark, you lick. Pee & roll happily in shit.

I want other beauties than these, brother, scent of aster in my mind. Your old laughter too.

[The Gate-Keeper looks at his young friends again. They are shocked & hardly nod.

[Kinley, restless, very restless, hardly held still by Christina, a helpful growl from Maya.

[A word to all from *Labyrinthine*: I will not be held so close for long. These boys know my feral wrath. *Nod, boys!*

[They nod. They know.

[The Gate-Keeper says, to Kinley, to *Labyrinthine*, a little more, please. We are nearly there, I promise.

[The tremors raised now do not cease, however. There is near an end to this & again run wild free. It will happen, by willing or will.]

lv.

“Deeper Creature time,” he writes, finding his old notes ledger & resuming on a fresh page. “Looking for a gape in my world, I keep thinking about this, about how little I know about it.

“They weren’t from Emandia as we were. They were native to this world, from the Island, its White Woods, its endless, pathless White Woods.”

Pauses. Looks around the nearly ageless dank of his office. Its books piled high, containers of herbs & potions, trinkets from the many places & times he’d travelled. Smells of decay dried to dust. His desk really a great table, covered too but for the area before him, cleared away periodically.

Himself dressed in soft rags, noone to show for, shine for, bother about. His body nearly immortal but old with patina, time & sadness.

Resumes. Struggles. “Or maybe it should be called Deeper Creature timelessness. For they do not live with awareness of time, shackled to its passing & *finitude*. *There is no time*.” Nods. “Theirs is an existence outside time’s passing, like my own, except that I am as aware of time as they aren’t.”

Picks up his ledger & on a whim brings it to the Tower office’s front window, where located his great spy-glass & thick maps of the Tangled Gate. *Where she’d sat*. He sniffs, can’t help himself. Just memories. Table not a quarter the size of his own, he moves things around, settles in. Dust, displaced, stays displaced, awake again, wondering.

And, there below, the Gate? This still the Island, that yet the Gate?

He mulls. This discontent won't salve itself, nor will sitting in this office do any better. The Gate?

Nothing to lose but his loneliness. Looks & finds his long unworn overcoat. Feels odd, like he won't be back here a long while, like it's time. For me, *there is time*. At least for now.

lvi.

The Gate never changes. So massively tall, & its legend where its scrollwork peaks: "*For those lost.*"

Enters & there is the Fountain, perpetually crumbling yet ever gushing, ever insisting a drink. A drink, & a choice. Briefly considers declining but then realizes he need the Gate's help. Whatever that might be, he needs it.

So takes his two-handed scoop of the cold, tingling water (music to taste, water to listen to?), drinks it on down deep, & moves past the Fountain.

They knew me once. We became friends & together helped the Princess to succeed. How do I reach them now? Remember my old advice to her: tap my head once, my heart once, sniff twice. Follow somewhat seeming random the vines-&-stones-lined paths.

Slows, frustrated. Skies above a silent grey. Wonders if it is possible to fail & exit the Gate a failure?

Wonders then at his own quick to give up.

Closes his eyes, begins to feel around, the air cool but not cold, the silence not terribly deep if one pressed a little—

Come on. *Come on!*—he calls wordlessly, calls & calls, cries & howls, moans unto *hmmmmmm*, summons all the hope & hopeful purpose he has—come on—*come on!*

Softly, at first, then again, then a little louder, the echoing through the air & through his mind, a cackle, another, *many cackles*, swooping & swirling around him, ringing, echoing, echoing, then echoing the echoes, it cannot be other than his old friend the wee Imp! Can it be? *It must.*

lvii.

The cackles continue their echoing play, & I follow. Follow, & yet no closer. I must faster. *I must play.*

I think of old times, the White Bunny, & I try. Long ears, glowing fur, pink nose, nothing. *Nothing*. Still man-shaped.

Man . . . shaped. Not thinking at all, this is my body's turn to do. I sleek down, not quite a bunny, or an imp, but a Creaturely form all my own, what I might have been I now am, for this little while. Listen close, I speed.

The cackles triple with delight, *this* is their Architect *come to play!* They direct me, a long tunnel of dancing cackles, & I follow, I speed like no man has, man I am, man I'm not.

Speed till I slow, slow sudden to stop. A cave. *This cave.* I know it. The Beast long lived here.

The cackles are urging me on in, but I remain still. The Beast is of forces deeper than my knowledge or skill. The Beast is this world itself, given a body to roam it, a mind to reck itself & all dwelling on it.

I kneel. I kneel very low toward the Cave & its possible inhabitant. I speak quietly, scrub a man's natural arrogance before his world, his hand's & eye's & mind's & throat's raw power, & I speak from my long loneliness & yearning.

"My friend brought me here. She urges me to pass. She is a Creature, & travels to her home. I am a man, of a kind, & wish to visit, with my questions. I ask your leave for safe passage. Perhaps there is still good in me to do others."

Upon my last words, & only these, a breath, a stirring, the sounds of something unearthed from dug & tossed rock. Something emits the Cave.

I stand. Approach. No. Yes. *Tis.* The blue bag I gave the Princess long ago. Whole & handled still. The Cave says nothing more but I sniff twice & feel my entry allowed. Realize myself still in Creaturely form as I make to pick up the bag with swift but clumsy paws. Regret, but reform.

About to revisit its contents, curious what remains, but the cackles sudden everywhere, high & low, they practically push me into the Cave, carrying my old bag unopened for now. Well.

Man again, I move at my own swift speed now. I feel more myself as this latter-day adventure continues, uncertain but burbling. Thinking me ready for anything.

No. And not. I come of a sudden into the too bright central cavern of these caves & tunnels, & for a lingering moment as I stop, crouch, choke my breath & beat still, I hear the scraping of stones, bare feet upon stones, bare feet dancing, dancing, a lithe body conjuring song from patterns & dreams. My heart stops. I fall away.

lviii.

When I come to, I am aloft, but back in the tunnel I emerged from. My form changed to, *ah*, I am again Hummingbird like when I first met her along paths of the Gate!

I'm afraid. She dances happily with the Creatures, she's found her content. She gifted me my Tower, day & night without ending, & I've balked. Dissatisfy with retiring quietly to a drawer, a man-shaped tool plied, & done.

I flit, flit some more, find myself falling into these pleasures. Remember to listen with ears & there are still cackles around me, waiting, now nudging a little, *come along, Hummingbird! New play! New play!*

Enter the great cavern again, inured to its bright light now, & see the Princess has concluded her solitary dance & now every Creature big & small joins in her frolic.

Many of the major Bears in this number, little ones too, even wee ones & their oddest of noises make me think of the Imp somehow. Several Giraffes, a grey Hedgehog, the White Bunny! So many more.

I join. Before I can think to think, or choose to choose, I join in & dance. Flitter high & low, feel out the song they sing, find my voice among the many others, & join in too. Like I belong. *I belong.*

My form shifts, unknowing to me, slowly, I become less Hummingbird & more the Creaturely form I'd chose to chase the cackles, swift & sleek, but then less this than a man's form, my form, still dancing, still singing. Still smiling among all these old friends.

When the singing crescendos & to its slow close, I feel crowds of Creatures dividing in twain before me as I half intentioned, nudged & nudged by cackles, clicks-clicks & noise-noises too now, I arrive, fully formed man, the dance & song finished, I arrive to the shocked, smiling, beautiful face of my long-beloved Princess. *Oh my.*

lix.

Labyrinthine says, quoting Heraclitus, "we are and are not."

Has new friends, they are small, wiggly, kind to *Labyrinthine*, they generate good feelings between them. Makes work go easier, these kind friends.

Nods to me. I resume.

Your smile holds me from falling, keeps me from fleeing. Your hair as red as always, as long, your eyes still a faerie blue, but nothing to your smile as you slow me enough to rest, not pause, in my place. Your smile the sum of what all these years have not been. Your smile sups upon me until I am well-chewed, swallowed, expelled back to myself as this calm reunion's moment.

"You came."

"You . . . called?"

She nods, steps forward, & grasps my hand. "It was time."



I feel something wordless, something I do not know, good or bad? I don't know. Look down. Our hands, as they keep grasping, meld to one.

I gasp. Begin to laugh. Still holding her, our hand, I lean over & laugh loud.

"What is it?"

I hold up our hand. "This! I think this is what got lost along the way. We let go each other's hand, & then came history. All of it."

She nods. I please her. She leads me by our hand somewhere, woods, White Woods? No Creatures follow us. All is quiet.

I want to say & say & say.

"I do too. It's OK."

Calm. A beat. A breath. OK.

"Where are we going?"

"Where I was bound already. I waited for you."

We come through the Woods to a clearing, a long one, & I see at the far end a platform, atop which sits a grand stage.

The Princess smiles even more so at me, I feel as though our limbs are twining amongst each other in her excitement. *Ahh*. Many Creatures now join us in the clearing.

We have no special place to stand or sit among our friends here, although I notice the White Bunny, the turtle who is not a turtle, & yes, the crazy gnattering Imp all nuzzle up near to us. They know me, sniff twice familiarly. My heart shines, & falls free.

"Tis a Grand Production!"

I nod. "There is no time."

She laughs. Points.

A white-furred bear wearing a long Scotch-styled scarf is waving a long paw & crying: "On . . . with . . . the . . . Show!"

There is the deep-black bear who comes out to dance, tells a few jokes, juggles a few, then more, then countless balls, then executes an impossible tumble into the crowd, returning before he left.

There is the black & white bear who slides onto the stage, dancing high & low, tapping his paws artfully to music I wonder must be the Traveling Troubadour's, & brings out the black bear & others to leap & fall to the audience's delight.

Our friend the White Bunny on stage performs many dazzling long-eared hops, impossibly high & fast!

There is a comical dalmatian & his daffy quips. There is a purple-furred dancing Creature, long ribbons in dizzying flourish. There is the tumbling brown monkey who jumps seeming miles high. Many, many others come & go.

I forget who I am & am smiling the Princess's smile, laughing her laugh, feeling her long deep warmth with these friends. This is who I am when the world isn't in peril, or when we let each other be.

There is the handsome furred bumblebee gliding over us, & atop his furred back is a small melancholy-faced pup, & they fly together not like steed & rider but like their paws too are one, like there is no other way to be, stars above, earth below, *we too are one, we too are one.*

I wake. Cry out. "*Shhh.*" Look around. *Oh.* Creatures cavern. They are clustered all around us, still dozing.

She smiles down at me, I panic, but feel our hand still warmly one. Relax a moment. Let her arms around me possess me all. So close. Release. *So close.*

"Yes. And no." We recede a little. Just a little.

"There's more. There's else."

"Not every Creature lives safely here."

"Nor most of the world. Shaped like men, Creatures. Trees. Everything."

"It's why I called you. Why you brought my blue bag."

I nod. I'm ready.

Lx.

Labyrinthine says, again quoting Heraclitus, "Nothing remains still."

Labyrinthine agrees. Having lived in many places, travelled far miles, grown sheet by sheet by sheet.

Labyrinthine's friends agree. Things change, a-gain & a-gain. *Labyrinthine*, *Lx* for short, laughs. *Things Change* is a relation.

Comfortable friends together, *Lx* nods me continue.

Sitting side by side, we unclasp the blue bag & open its cover. A soft floral scarf covers its contents. She removes a dearly known item to me. The braided Threads, hands them to me, these are still powerful for our task. I nod.

Then she takes out two small red balls, blue striped. Three more, orange these. She nods this time. I put them aside me with the Braided Thread.

The Creatures stir & wake around us, sniff twice, know change & gather, gather close.

We each touch the Creature near to hand, the Princess her White Tiger, me his kind-eyed bullfrog companion.

I feel each Creature touching to each, one to many to all, paws, nuzzles, we too are one, we too are one.

“You’re doing this to teach me. You know this already. You always did.”

The Princess smiles at me, her smile like shine, like wash, lets me close to her, her skin, her hair, allows me rove across her cheek, touch her lips, smooth to her neck, ‘cross her shoulders, upon her breasts, of them, in them, on them, pleases me man, pleases me soul, becomes my tongue sliding across her body, taste you tasting me, let flesh meld & light, let flesh twain & delight to chase, release, chase, release, we too are one & two & one & two & one too.

She lays the colored balls, the Creatures know them as Treasures, in a pattern to broadcast us where we will. Twined one to another, the Princess allowing the girl’s form in her for my pleasure, touched by every Creature as they doze near us, & later to dancing, & later to exploring cavern & Gate above alike, we begin to sing pathways into the world, touch & teach others how.

Remember some things. It took thick books of why & walls of fear against beasts of the world & unknown men’s faces to shock you into following, obeying silence. It took centuries of contrived sufferings to convince you that *this world is to be suffered*.

It took great iron cities built gouging & burning from the earth to convince you that the world does not easily provide to all. Caterwauling leaders to scare you from each other too close, & let the suffering men & women in the streets lie, & *let them suffer*.

You had to tame. You had to conquer.
 You had to cage. You had to own.
 You had to celebrate dominance with feast.
 Cry & fuck. Cry & fuck some more.

There is no time. Especially in dreams. As we sing into the world, a low *hmmmmmm* you will not yet hear, tis because it began in your dreams, what we sang you as we held you close, travelled you by cosmos & microbe to see in all we too are one, we too are one.

Travel you to the Tangled Gate, source of your world, secret you can enter & learn to know. Just a drink from the Fountain, still lingering on the Gate’s legend “*For those lost*.” Yes. You were. You will find your way now.



In the Gate, down its many tall pathways of vines & stones, we'll follow you now. There is the Hummingbird & its tale of men & women remembering their first song & flying away, *awakening & flying away.*

Perhaps you will lead to Cloverdale, its dank first room, its room of mirrors, its desert & there a small shack. Will you meet the small exotic or the Tramp his grieving friend? *Where will you lead us next?*

Maybe, freely going now, you will find the *hekk* stick in your hands & thus decide easily where this dream next, lead us on or let us go, part the Gate itself, or else a smile, & deeper in.

If Cloverdale, you might come to the Carnival Room if you can, learn to sing how &, entering its marvels, for you a long-limbed fiddler, for you a great buck barking you to knee? Will you carriage with us to the far end of the world, behold the Sleepers, join them awhile in their Sleeping Capsules, drink the juice to cross the Dreaming, or show them how without Capsule, without juice?

Will you choose to travel with us many dreams like these, learn what we are, Architect & Princess, & behold the Island outside the Gate, live with us its story, how we came to be, what we learned to know, what mysteries we cannot reck, wild cards to our equations, our songs, our histories, our loves?

As we sit here now with you, in this warm cavern, these friendly Creatures all around, some dozing, all partners in the *Hmmmmmm*, we invite you to wake when you will, how you will, make of this dream & its like whatever you wish, but return whenever you wish to as well. The Braided Thread we leave, ever weaving through your dreams. Yours to grasp or leave lie.

[And when she at last came, & took your other hand, & when he came & took my other, something was now complete, now told of what was & what passes on to be. I did not let go, I am a man & I both hope & fear, but I willed my heart open wider to all, to every & all, we too are one, we too are one, together we will architect this world. Together we will architect this beautiful world.]

"Cut!" cries the Gate-Keeper, & for a lingering moment all is still.

Then Kinley & Christina both stand up, stretch out their muscles from their long sitting. Maya remains seated though. Benny's already gone, of course.

"Are you OK?"

"I'm staying."

"Staying?"

She nods.

"I don't think we should be apart," says Christina, getting suddenly upset. Kinley says nothing.

"Tell her!" Christina snaps.

Kinley kneels close to Maya, takes her hands. "We'll never really be apart."

Maya nods. "I know."

He stands. Takes Christina's hand. Nods to the Gate-Keeper whose crew is packing up many cameras.

Christina is reluctant still but Maya smiles up at her. A real, loving, lasting smile. To keep, to remember, eventually to renew.

They part the cavern, nuzzled along the way by many Creatures.

"What now?"

"I'm not sure."

"Deeper in?"

"No." He stops in the tunnel they are in, puts his arms around her, they kiss deeply.

Christina is pleased, of course, but unanswered. Remains so as they walk on.

Talks suddenly. "Princess or demon?"

"Hm?"

"Am I the Princess or the demon?"

"Oh, the demon for sure."

They both laugh loudly, clasp hands tighter, & walk on.

Labyrinthine nods at me. A reasonable good conclusion to Part Nine. *LX's* friends are napping nearby.

"I don't know what next either."

"Part Ten."

"Yes. But what?"

"It'll happen. It's what you do."

I nod. It's what I do.

The evening is cool, still sunny. The traffic passes slowly, rush hour, the ironically named time.

I sit at a cafe I'd not been before, at a sidewalk table, behind a low fence. People pass by. A glittery theater marquee across the street. Restaurants.

Strangers avoid eye contact in cities. Do not willing touch. Save contact & touch & words for known faces, or transacting business.

A man across the street sits against a wall, his begging sign & cup. Shakes the cup; most ignore & pass by. His clothes & boots are well worn. Wears sunglasses.

It's *all* Tangled Gate, in a way, all White Woods. This world an Island.

When more to say, twill come new pages to say it.

6-6-2014

To be continued in Cenacle | 90 | October 2014

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NEW ENGLAND

Notes on Contributors

Bashō was born in 1644 near Ueno, Iga Province, Japan, & died in 1694 in Osaka. He is considered to be the greatest haiku writer to have ever lived. His poetry in this issue was also reprinted in a volume in the 2004 Burning Man Books series (<http://www.scriptorpress.com/nobordersbookstore.html>).

Charlie Beyer lives in Oreana, Idaho. His prose regularly appears in the pages of *The Cenacle*. His crazy dino bones writings are delighting many readers. More of his work can be found at: <http://therubyeye.blogspot.com>.

Joe Ciccone lives in Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts. His poetry last appeared in *Cenacle* | 88 | April 2014. His poem in this issue came from a chance question I asked him. Turns out he's trying to carve new poems down to their roots.

Joe Coleman lives in Melrose, Massachusetts. His poetry regularly appears in *The Cenacle*. We've been talking about collecting some of his best in a new RaiBook volume, possibly to be published in 2015.

Judih Haggai lives at Kibbutz Nir Oz in Israel. Her poetry appears regularly in *The Cenacle*. More of her work can be found at: <http://tribes.tribe.net/poetryjams>. She fits more into her teacherly & artistic days than can easily be imagined possible.

Nathan D. Horowitz lives in Vienna, Austria. His piece in this issue is excerpted from his epic work-in-progress, *Nighttime Daydreams*. More of his work can be found at: <http://www.scribd.com/Nathan%20Horowitz> and <http://lordarbor.bandcamp.com>.

Martina Newberry lives in Hollywood, California. Her poetry last appeared in *Cenacle* | 87 | December 2013. More of her work can be found at: <http://rollwiththechanges.org>. Happy to have her writing again in these pages, & also to hear the good news that her health is improving.

Reneé Schamberger lives in Pullman, Washington. This issue marks her poetry's first appearance in *The Cenacle*. We met because she wrote a letter of admiration to me about the April 2014 issue of this journal, & mentioned she writes poetry, & naturally I wanted her looped in for the next (this current) issue.

Scientific American was founded by inventor and publisher Rufus M. Porter in 1845 as a four-page weekly newspaper. It has a long history of presenting scientific information on a monthly basis to the general educated public. It can be found in print for sale & also online at: <http://www.scientificamerican.com>.

Tom Sheehan lives in Saugus, Massachusetts. His writing appears regularly in *The Cenacle*. It is always a pleasure to read from a batch of his stories & pick the right one to appear in these pages.

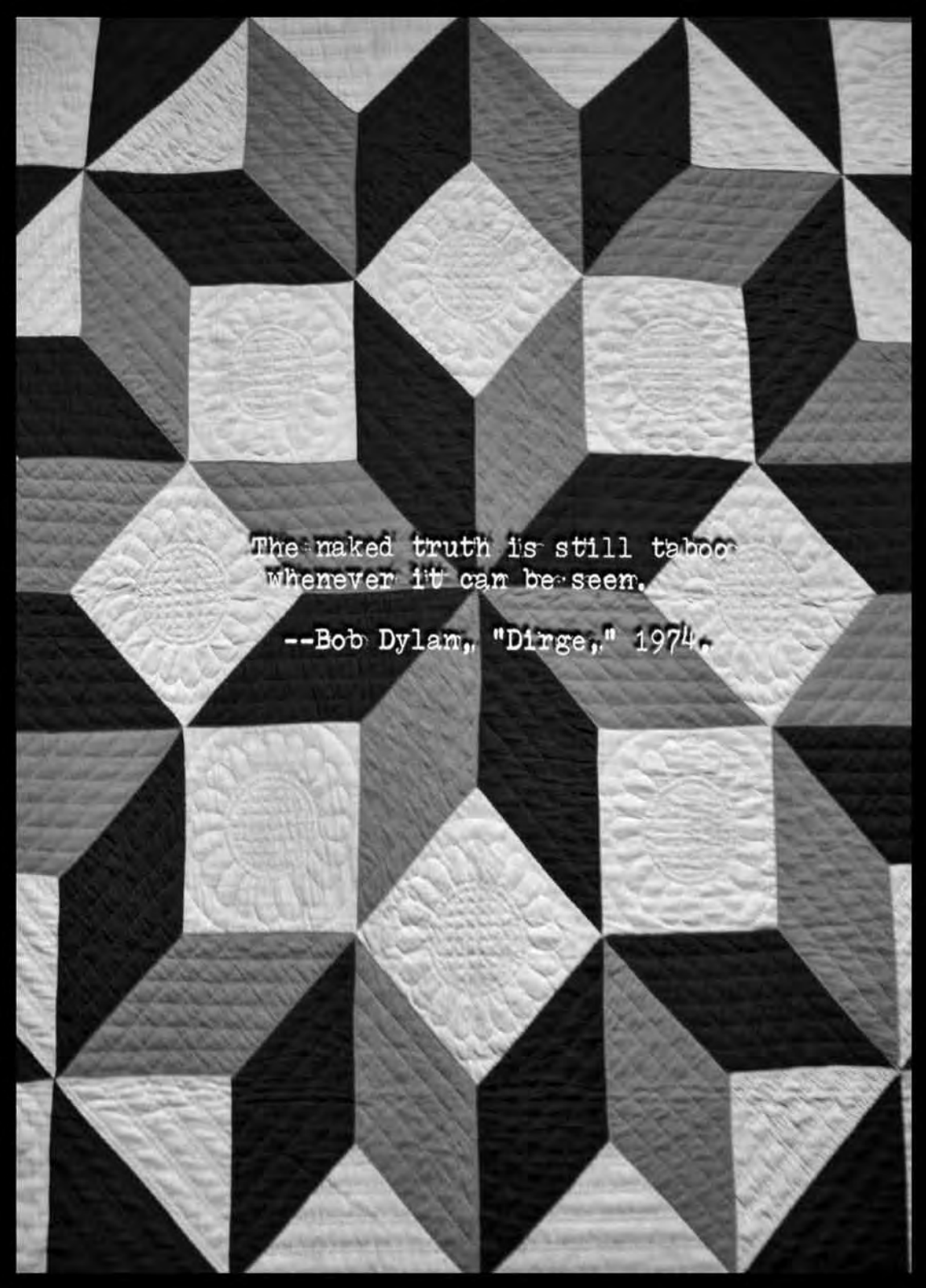
Kassandra Soulard lives in Melrose, Massachusetts. I cannot help but wish for everyone who has slept many years alone the pleasure of waking up new with such a loving & lovely person as she is.

Raymond Soulard, Jr. lives in Melrose, Massachusetts. This periodical exists in part because when I was much younger, the chances to see one's work in print were limited, & controlled by a few. Nowadays, put some effort in, learn some skills, obtain the right tools, & you can be underway too. And take your friends along!

Victor Vanek lives in The Dalles, Oregon. His photography last appeared in *Cenacle* | 72 | April 2010, but we've never had the pleasure of publishing his writing before. He calls it cathartic work, & that's so, but I call it delightful too.

* * * * *





The naked truth is still taboo
whenever it can be seen.

--Bob Dylan, "Dirge," 1974.

